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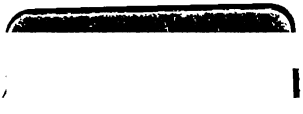
MISTAKEN SIGNS.

AND OTHER PAPERS ON CHRISTIAN LIFE AND EXPERIENCE.



MISTAKEN SIGNS.

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AND

OTHER PAPERS ON CHRISTIAN LIFE AND EXPERIENCE.

BY

REV. W. L. WATKINSON.

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TO

MRS. JAMES WALKER,

EASTBANK, BOLTON;

IN RECOGNITION OF MANY KINDNESSES,

AND WITH MUCH RESPECT

AND SYMPATHY.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. MISTAKEN SIGNS	1
II. COMPENSATIONS	16
III. THE POSSIBILITIES OF LIFE	32
IV. PERFECT PEACE	46
V. NARROW ESCAPES	62
VI. THE BEST LOT THE COMMON LOT	77
VII. UNACCOMPLISHED AIMS	93
VIII. COMPLEMENTARY FORCES IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE	110
IX. THE OPEN SECRET OF CHARACTER	126
X. BURIED IDOLS	141
XI. THE WEALTH OF LIFE	155
XII. PASSIVE HOURS	170

I.

MISTAKEN SIGNS.

'Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.'—ECCLES. vii. 10.

ON the whole we may confidently affirm that the world improves, and yet in certain moods we are apt to regard its condition as increasingly desperate. Thus we are persuaded is it sometimes with our religious life—we mistake the signs of progress for those of retrogression, and through this mistake do injustice to ourselves. There is always, of course, the danger of regarding ourselves with too indulgent eye, but with really sincere men the chief peril, we must insist, lies the other way: they more frequently write unjustifiably bitter things against themselves than lay flattering unction to their soul.

'The mind,
An artist at creating self-alarms,'

is not more ingenious or fertile in creating needless fears about the natural life than it is in creating such

fears about our inner life. And we must not regard this unjust self-accusation, this grieving of the soul when God has not grieved it, this voluntary humiliation of the spirit, as a comparatively innocent error, and one altogether on the side of safety. The sense of progress is a mighty spring of progress, and to destroy a legitimate sense of progress is to cut one of the main sinews of the soul, and arrest that growth in power and holiness which we so greatly desire. If there is a 'needs be' that we 'are in heaviness,' and God is pleased to permit shadows to gather on our mind and path, blessing will come out of the discipline; but to plunge our soul into gratuitous disquietudes can only impair and impede our spiritual life. We must guard our heart with jealousy, and take care also that we do not enfeeble ourselves by unwisely marring a genuine confidence and joy. The misinterpreting signs of spiritual progress into signs of decadence—to the loss of much power and gladness—we believe to be a common error, and propose a few guiding thoughts on the subject.

'*I am not so happy as I once was*,' is a lament from Christian lips with which we are almost distressingly familiar. We look back to our conversion, to our original dedication to God, to the deeply-coloured dawn of our spiritual history, to the glittering joy which welled up in our soul in those days, to the bright beams which were then shed upon us from the opened heaven, and the memory moves us to tears. Then 'all things

were apparelled in celestial light, the glory and the freshness of a dream.' It is the crowning pleasure of memory to recall the 'marvellous light,' the rapturous joy, the triumphal song, the hearty fellowship of the first years of spiritual life. Then we turn to consider the present phases of our experience, and conclude sadly that we are not so happy now as then—all the gold has changed to grey. Now, is this really so? are we less truly happy than in the days of yore? We fully allow that it may be so. Through unfaithfulness we may have lost the joy and power of the days when first we knew the Lord, and our dryness and sadness of spirit be only the natural consequence of our sloth and sin. But may not the mournful inference be mistaken, and what we regard as a diminished happiness be really a profounder blessedness? The essence of religion is submission to the will of God, and that grave tranquillity of mind which follows upon deeper self-renunciation, the solemn silence of soul which succeeds acquiescence in the bitterest episodes of life, the chastened cheerfulness which survives the strain and strife of years, is a real, although not perhaps seeming, gain upon the first sparkling experiences of our devout life.

'Moreover Job continued his parable, and said, O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the

secret of God was upon my tabernacle; when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were about me; when I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil . . . Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand. My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch. My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand.'

But all the time the patriarch was grieving over a vanished felicity and glory, he was realizing truer and loftier views of God and a deeper and purer righteousness, the best aspects of the man were being refined, the unworthy elements were being purged away, and the sufferer was entering upon a nobler joyfulness than he had ever known before—the glee of childhood was passing into manhood's serene reason, the summer brook that run with thin music through the reeds was passing into the infinite power of ocean, which reflects all the face of heaven, and whose voice is the music of the world. May it not be thus with ourselves? The fire, the flush, the rapture of past days has ceased with the past, but something more precious has taken the place of these excitements, valuable as they were in the particular stages of development to which they belonged. A quiet assurance, a sweet confidence in God which no vicissitude can disturb, a rest in Christ, deep, constant and sure, a submissiveness of spirit to the will of God, which is in itself unknown peace

—these are ours, instead of the colouring, the efflorescence, the ecstasy of the days of our youth; and seeing this to be so, we cannot justly declare the former days better than these. A garden in spring is a thing of glory for poet and painter,—to a superficial eye far more glorious than in autumn hue,—and yet it is when the blossoms are all shed, when the summer birds are flown, when the butterfly, 'gayest masker in the carnival,' has passed with the painted leaves amid which he sported,—it is then that the husbandman's eye brightens to behold precious fruits in red and gold on the bending branch. Has it been thus with our religious life? Can we honestly think this before God? Have we a comfortable assurance that the gay blossom has become the mellowed cluster? If so, time has given us more, far more, than it has taken away, and it is a mistake to harass the soul with pictures of the past.

'*I am not so holy as I once was*,' is another note of self-depreciation with which we are unhappily familiar, and with which, perhaps, we are sometimes disposed to sympathize. When we first realized forgiveness, we felt that there was '*no* condemation'; the Spirit of God seemed to hallow our whole nature; our heart was cleansed and strangely glowed; our garments were always white, and our heads lacked no ointment. But it is not so now. We have not done all we meant to do, not been all we meant to be, and have a consciousness of imperfection more vivid than ever.

With the lapse of years we have grown more dissatisfied with ourselves; and this more acute sense of worldliness leads us to the conclusion that we have lost the rarer purity of other days. Once more we admit that this may be the case. There may be a very real depreciation in our life; we may have allowed our raiment to be soiled by the world and the flesh. But may not this growing sense of imperfection be a sign of the perfecting of our spirit? It may be that we are not less pure than formerly, only the Spirit of God has been opening our eyes, refining our taste, heighten- our sensibility, and faults once latent are now discovered, secret sins once overlooked are now keenly felt and bitterly deplored: the clearer vision detects deformities, the finer ear discords, the purer taste admixtures which were once unsuspected. The consciousness of evil may increase in us because evil has been gaining upon us, or because our sympathy with righteousness is all the more intense. We shall never feel the power and terror of sin more than in the moment in which we are purged from it for ever; moral deformity will never give us a more poignant pain than when we have the least of it; moral discord will never occasion us a more profound pang than in that faint, final jar which precedes the full music of a harmonized life; and the parting taint of the moral malady will cause us a deeper humiliation and sorrow than we could possibly know when the health of our spirit was almost desperate. It is not the most imper-

fect Christian who feels imperfection most, but the Christian most nearly perfect. As Dante addresses one of his grandest characters:

> 'O noble conscience, and without a stain,
> How sharp a sting is trivial fault to thee!'

It is possible to be growing in moral strength and grace, in everything that constitutes perfection of character and life, when appearances are decidedly to the contrary. Watch the sculptor and note how many of his strokes seem to mar the image on which he works, rendering the marble more unshapely than it seemed the moment before, and yet in the end a glorious statue rises under his hand; so the blows of God, bringing us into glorious grace, often seem as if they were marring what little symmetry belonged to us, often as if knocking us out of shape altogether. Yet under illusions of backwardation the supreme Artist perfects that which concerneth us. Putting us back He is putting us forward; the roughening ordeal is really part of the polishing; the half-grace is shattered that some ornament of finished beauty may take its place; some special excellence becomes less conspicuous that other perfections may attain just development and proportion; we are humbled on one of our strong points that 'the faults of our excellences' may be corrected; the shining gold is thrown into the pot and for a moment dimmed with fume, that it may be indeed gold of God shining brighter still; and the severe trial

of our temper, courage, patience, which has seemed to mar our character, has only destroyed for a while the superficial and conventional propriety that our superiority might become deep as the soul. As in art, so in nature, we find progress under apparent retrogression; growth under seeming decay; development under evident degeneration. Similar phenomena reappear in the life of the soul, and we may easily misconstrue the symptoms of our deeper life. The bright hues of the caterpillar fade so soon as it begins to undergo its grand transformation, and the soul must be constantly parting with some lesser loveliness that it may realize the deeper, fuller, everlasting beauty. There has been a constant gain in consolidation and massiveness of character, and although in various stages of life we may seem to drop desirable phases of experience, yet at length in an accomplished righteousness we shall prove the fulness of beauty. True, sincere, loyal, but downcast children of God, it was not better with you in former days: for under the acuter sense of limitation and failure you have been growing into a wisdom, a refinement, a humility, which is altogether beyond the light laughter and sweet innocence of religious childhood.

'*I do not love God as I once did*,' is another sorrowful confession of the soul. How glowing was that first love! Your whole soul went out after the Beloved! You knew your heart full of the pure affection the bursting joy! But it is not so now. The

temperature of your soul seems to have fallen, your love to your God and Saviour does not glow as in those memorable hours when first it was kindled 'by the spirit of burning.' Once again, it may be so. The Church at Ephesus had 'left' its 'first love,' and we may not cherish the same fervid affection for God which once filled and purified our heart. But may we not misconceive the love we bear to God? Our more dispassionate affection may be equally genuine and positively stronger. Take an illustration of the same passion in another manifestation. In the newly-affianced pair what demonstrations of affection! what poetry! what vows of fidelity are made! what gifts exchanged! But see the selfsame couple whitened with years. No more passionate demonstrations. Why? Because their love is less? No, but because their love is deeper far than that of all honeymoons. It is so still, because so profound; it is unspoken, because unspeakable. If no more gifts are exchanged, it is because the gift of the heart is mutually known to be complete and everlasting. Somewhat is it thus with our relation to God. Our love to God may not be so gushing, so florid in expression as it once was, but in this it only bears the sober hue of all ripened things.

The test of love is *sacrifice*. We love those for whose sake we are prepared to suffer. Will our love to God to-day bear this test? Would we for His sake endure hardship, death? Are we ready, day by day, to bear our cross—to suffer any reproach or tribulation

so that we may be Christ's disciples? Are we sure of ourselves here? Do we deny ourselves for Christ's sake? and are we willing to be anything, to do anything, in the spirit of loyalty to Him? Whatever abatement of feeling we may deplore, are we conscious of readiness to suffer extreme tribulations for our Saviour and His kingdom? Many sorrowing souls know they are ready to die for Him whom they cannot love, as they feel He ought to be loved.

The test of love is *obedience*. We love those to whom we pay ungrudging service. 'If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. . . . Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' Here, once more, are we sure of ourselves? We 'have not wickedly departed from' our God. Is it not the supreme purpose of our heart to bring life into entire harmony with the will of God? We are not stirred as of old, we struggle not with the same vehement and irrepressible emotion, we do not soar and sing as when we first found wings; but we do love the law and keep with some faithfulness the statutes and commandments of God. Let us listen then to the Master: 'He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him. . . . He that loveth Me not, keepeth not My sayings.'

The test of love is *confidence*. We love those whom

we trust. Do we not feel, then, that God has our confidence so thoroughly that even if He 'slay' us, yet will we trust in Him? In the former days we were easily ruffled and fainted, but now our confidence is established and victorious beyond all our first experience. With all our misgivings about a colder heart we yet exult: 'I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Surely such a love, 'strong as death,' and which many 'waters cannot quench,' is not less worthy than that 'first love' over which you linger so fondly. 'Red-hot religion' has its place and value, but white-hot religion, the silent, intense force which acts without sparks, smoke or noise, is a Diviner thing. Is it thus with our love to God? Has that passion simply changed from red to white? Has the sentiment become a principle, the ecstasy a habit, the passion a law? If so, the former days were not better than these.

"*I do not make the rapid progress I once did,*' is another familiar regret. Once we had the pleasing sense of swift and perpetual progress. Each day we went from strength to strength, each night knew our 'moving tent a day's march nearer home.' But we have not that sense of progress now, and this fact is to us, perhaps, a great grief. Our grief may be well founded; for those who 'did run well' are sometimes

'hindered' and fall into slowest pace. Yet impatience with our rate of progress is capable of another construction. You see the sun rise: in a few moments it has left the horizon, and you marvel at its rapid march of light; yet every moment it seems to move more slowly, and soon it is only by oblique signs you know it moves at all. So the moon bounds into the sky, but as it swims into the blue depths its motion seems lost, and one might think it standing still, as 'in the valley of Ajalon.' Having no longer the earth-line for gauge, the appearance of progress is lost. It is somewhat with our spiritual career as with these orbs of heaven. Our first experiences of the Christian life are in such direct and striking contradistinction to the earthly life that our sense of progress is most vivid and delightful; but as we climb heaven, get nearer God, traverse the infinite depths of love and righteousness sown with all the stars of light, the sense of progress may well be less definite than when we had just left the world behind. And in considering our rate of progress, we must not forget that the sense of progress is regulated by the desire for progress. With no special anxiety to reach the termination of a railway journey, an ordinary rate of progress is satisfactory; but intensely anxious to reach a given goal, the swiftest express train seems slow. And may it not be that impatience with our moral advancement is the result of stronger aspirations and more passionate desire? Once we measured our progress with the world we had

left behind, and the feeling was deeply gratifying; now we oftener think of the glorious goal to which we move, and, charmed with the vision of perfected holiness, infinite blessedness, everlasting life, have rather the sense of distance, and fret ourselves that so much glory and gladness are yet beyond our reach. But as the sun in the firmament, as 'the moon walking in brightness' are moving with equal swiftness near the horizon or in the heights, so really is the sincere soul, with its varying moods, hastening on its path to entire perfecting and infinite satisfaction. The consciously disloyal soul may justly mourn departed blessedness, and wisely inquire concerning past days. The old joy, love, hope and attendant growth of spirit have suffered sad impairment. You remember with inexpressive pathos those auspicious seasons when, with a new-born love, you prayed and sang, and all the world looked beautiful in the light of heaven. And One above Whose love has been wounded, has yet not forgotten those days: 'Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.' Thank God your case is not irremediable! Speaking of the lost, the poet affirms:

> 'There is no greater sorrow
> Than to be mindful of the happy time
> In misery';

but such hopeless grief is not yours. All lost experiences of delight may be recovered and heightened. 'Repent, and do the first works,' and the spring-tide of the past shall dawn again with the singing-birds and the flowers; the robes so spotted shall be washed whiter than snow; the smoking flax of your diminished love shall revive a living flame; and casting 'aside every weight,' you shall run 'the race that is set before you.' The sincere lamenting disciple may be comforted. The first flowers of the year are pale and faint, yet the spring flowers have a charm and fame beyond all the glorious garland of summer; so we pathetically recall the spring-tide of the soul, and think very tenderly of its first love and joy; yet is the day better than the dawn, the summer than the spring. Hardship, grief, change and loss have chastened us since the new song was first put in our lips, but through perplexities and tribulations Heaven is carrying on its work in our heart, and ever and anon it is suddenly revealed how much we have gained in the power of godliness. 'God moves in a mysterious way' in the education of His children, and postponements are accelerations, humiliations ennoblements, eclipses illuminations, our seeming undoing is our making, when we feel the chief of sinners we are closest to Christ, when we think ourselves going down in the deep we are straightway at the shore. 'Forgetting those things which are behind,' let us 'reach forth' to grander promises. In

comparing the present with the past, we may make many mistakes; in self-introspection we may easily err, for great is the mystery of spirit-growth; but look up to the grand Example, look forward to the grand prize, and you shall renew your youth like the eagle, reaching the highest flights of life. The flashing diamond was fashioned in the dark rock; the crimsoned flower painted in the closed bud; and through perplexing episodes of thought and feeling do we arrive at immortal perfection.

II.

COMPENSATIONS.

'In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it: He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind.'—Isa. xxvii. 8.

WHATEVER uncertainty may exist as to the exact reading of the text, there is no mistaking its special teaching. The prophet sets forth the fact that the punishment God inflicts upon Israel is tempered by mercy, and does not go beyond what the moral correction of Israel necessitated. The encouraging lesson here taught is, that God determines very exactly the measure of our tribulation, ever mingling mercy with judgment, and permitting trial no further than our moral perfecting requires. He sifts, He sometimes sifts by a violent wind; but He only sifts, He does not mar and destroy.

I. Life at large furnishes us with an illustration of the text. Through human sin the whole world has been filled with disorder and suffering. 'By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.' Wherever we look—whether in nature or the race—

we witness scenes of confusion and misery. God did not threaten us in vain; the power of His displeasure has been bitterly felt throughout the whole creation. Yet are we sure that judgment has not come upon us to the uttermost. Such is the condition of the world, that two views of it are possible: the pessimist view, which pronounces the terrestrial system to be utterly evil; the optimist view, which holds this the best of possible worlds: the advocates of both theories finding much in support of their particular interpretation. The world is dark enough to justify a very sad philosophy, and yet the regulations restrictive of evil, the healing processes, the restorative forces, the system of compensations, the wide spaces for positive pleasure which we find in nature and human life, show the world to be far from a condition of unmixed and hopeless evil. That two views of the world are thus possible is in itself clear proof that the broken law has not been permitted to work the full sum of its damning consequences; for had the broken law fully avenged itself, all ameliorative and beneficent aspects must have ceased, and no two views of the world have been tenable for a moment.

The fact is, the central truth of revelation, the redemption of the world by the Son of God, tells at every point; the whole circle of nature and the entire course of human history bearing witness to the tempering mercy of God in Christ. A traveller recently returned from Africa relates that one day overcome

by intense heat he fell asleep on the baked earth, but on awaking had the sensation of freshness, and found it was caused by the thoughtfulness of his attendants who were standing around him, receiving upon themselves the fierce glare, and sheltering his recumbent body from the ardent rays of a vertical sun. In truth the whole world rests in the shadow of Him Who stands between us and the consuming fire of outraged law, and in virtue of His interposition a thousand blessings are ours. 'And a Man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.' This is poetry, indeed, but the poetry of this great sorrowful world, for God in Christ shelters a guilty race from the full blaze of wrath, from the whirlwind of ruin, securing to them also many rich consolations and satisfactions until the storms are overpast. It was essential to the vindication of the supreme government, to the purging of the sinning race, that the wickedness of the world should be punished, but everywhere we behold compassion moderating the stroke of God's hand, and hear Heaven's voice, 'I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.' In physical geography, in physiology, in the seasons, and in all other directions the scientist finds the rough wind stayed in the day of His east wind. The critics find fault with Rubens's picture of the Crucifixion—they say he has painted

Golgotha like a garden where you can scarcely see the skulls for the flowers. This may, perhaps, be a defective picture of Golgotha, but it is a grand symbolic picture of our world; the things of sadness, pain and death being half-hidden by the flowers which mercy has caused everywhere to grow.

II. God's providential dealings with His children illustrate abundantly the same law of mercy. It is essential to the unlearning of our errors, and the perfecting of our spirit in holiness, that we should be familiar with tribulation; but it is deeply interesting to observe the various methods by which God reduces the whirlwind to a winnowing breeze.

Sometimes this is effected by *educating* us against the day of adversity. 'Prepare us for every event of Thy Providence,' is a common petition on praying lips, and one unquestionably often answered by the Hearer of prayer. We see only a little way around us and before us, but He with Whom we have to do is acquainted with the whole field of life, and knows the end from the beginning: 'for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.' God uses His foreknowledge on behalf of His people, educating us elaborately against coming scenes of trial. Most likely we are totally unaware of the process; it is only when we have passed through the ordeal that the discipline of years stands revealed. Then we perceive why our mind has

been specially directed to given truths; why we have been led in prayer to seek special gifts and graces; why we have formed certain friendships and associations. Entering upon experiences peculiarly trying to faith or principle, we have the consciousness not only of general strength, but of technical preparedness —our feet shod for the road, our weapons strictly proper to the warfare. How finely this merciful arrangement breaks the force of tribulation! Are we not often persuaded that if some trial which we now sustain triumphantly had happened to us earlier it would have overwhelmed us, but the educational stage interposed by Heaven has matured necessary qualifications of head and heart, and rendered us invulnerable to the fiery trial? When the hosts encamp against us, we are provisioned and garrisoned against their beleaguerment; when the tempest descends, we are hidden in the rock; when the sea rises and rages, our storm-sails are set, our bark ballasted for the storm.

On other occasions the force of disaster is broken by the *graduation* of trial. Is not this exemplified in the instance of Job? Successive messengers bring to the patriarch their sad tidings, but the crowning woe comes last. The same order has been observed in the sufferings of the Primitive Church. 'So when they had further *threatened* them, they let them go' (Acts iv. 21). 'And laid their hands on the Apostles, and put them *in the common prison*' (v. 18). 'When they had called the Apostles, and *beaten* them' (v. 40).

'And they *stoned* Stephen' (vii. 59). Menaces prepared them for captivity; fetters inured them for the scourge; the scourge ascertained their royalty, and left them strong enough to claim the martyr's diadem. Little by little were they accustomed to the full weight of the Cross. And thus God still secures the safety of His suffering ones. Let a ponderous weight drop suddenly on a machine, and the jerk brings it down with a crash; graduate the strain, and no harm is done. How easily the delicate mechanism of the moral man might be broken down! but whilst the engineer is imperfectly versed in 'the theory of strains,' and often sadly miscalculates the 'breaking point' of materials entering into his constructions, He Who made us knows perfectly the strength and frailty of each, and with a faultless delicacy lays upon us the burdens of life.

Again, tribulation is often relieved by *counterbalancing advantages.* There is a passage in the Old Testament which has been pressed much too far in the service of sadness. 'Now Naaman, captain of the host of the King of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper.' It has long been the fashion to deduce from this description the melancholy lesson, that whatever may be our general good fortune in life there is certain to be some dismal 'but' which will go a long way to mar

the whole. We take it that the passage in question teaches also a very different and far more precious lesson. Suppose we read: 'Naaman was a leper, but he was captain of the host of the King of Syria, he was also a mighty man in valour, a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria.' This rendering is just as legitimate as the other. Be sure, where there is a 'but' against us, there are, as in the case of Naaman, several grand 'buts' for us, and it will be most to our good to ponder these. In nature we constantly see this compensatory action—see the rod of God, like that of Aaron, breaking into flowers. Losing eyesight, our other faculties forthwith acquire preternatural acuteness, and so the old poet quaintly expresses the dexterity and sensitiveness of the blind by calling the blind man's hand 'the blind man's candle.' And this is only one of a thousand instances of nature's habit of securing to us equivalents, compensations, abatements, solacements for our deprivations, infirmities and sorrows. In that law of sympathy which prevails throughout society we see once again the sword of judgment crossed by mercy's sceptre. The sick and suffering are objects of special sympathy and succour. Macaulay writes of John Bunyan: 'He had several small children, and among them a daughter who was blind, and whom he loved with peculiar tenderness. He could not, he said, bear even to let the wind blow on her.' And

thus the unfortunate are ever excused, watched over, provided for, enfolded in the social love. Drifting from the realms of night are toppling bergs of horror threatening to overwhelm us in unmitigated disaster, but in the warm gulf-stream of human sympathy these menacing ills are diminished to bearable proportions or dissolved altogether in floods of blessing. In countless ways God makes His suffering people to know that if the roses of life bear thorns, the thorns of life also bear roses. The Jewish tradition relates that after the Fall the two angels of God—Judgment and Mercy—were sent forth together to do their office upon the sinning but redeemed race, and together they act to this day. Where one afflicts, the other heals. Where one makes a rent, the other plants a flower. Where one carves a wrinkle, the other kindles a smile. Where one scowls a storm, the other spreads a rainbow. Where one poises the glittering sword, the other covers our naked head with succouring wing. It is ever thus. His tender mercies are over all that His hands have made, and although we have brought upon ourselves awful sorrows, yet He so administers the world that by countless noble devices He softens our lot and saves us from despair.

III. In God's spiritual kingdom and government we find our last illustration of the inspiring truth we seek to inculcate. In the kingdom of grace are special equivalents for life's losses, special inspira-

tions for the passage of flood and flame. In dark periods we acquire a special interest in the Word of God. Times of adversity bring out multitudes of precious promises, as night brings out the stars. And not only so, but in the bitter conflicts of life we gain a fuller, clearer vision of truth in general, and realize its peculiar preciousness. Truths relating to the Father, the truth as it is in Jesus, truths of immortality, brighten upon us as we pass one stern examination after another. This fuller, richer apprehension of the mind and purpose of God imbues us with new, strange qualities, and the fire forgets its power to burn. On the one side, is a darkening world; on the other side, a brightening Bible; and so the rough wind is stayed in the day of His east wind. In dark periods we also receive special measures of the Grace of God. The Spirit of God can inspire our heart with His own love; illuminate our understanding with His own light; animate our will with His own invincible strength and resolution; bathe our spirit in His own ineffable joy. And all this He does in an extraordinary degree when we try to bring character to its best whilst life is at its worst. Miss Havergal writes her mother: '*More* pain, dearest mother? May it be more support, more grace, more tenderness from the God of all comfort, more and more! May we not expect the "mores" always to be in tender proportion to each other?' The 'mores' *are* always in tender propor-

tion to each other. As the plot of life thickens the Spirit of God beats new pulses into the loyal soul, and equips it with invincible fortitude.

> 'When my sorrows most increase,
> Let thy strongest joys be given.'

So it ever is. All can understand here how the back is fitted for the burden, even when that burden is most terrible. 'Strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man,' we bear the heaviest burden of all, even that 'Cross' by which the world is crucified to us, by which we are crucified to the world, and far from shrinking bear it triumphantly as a weight of glory.

We must ever gratefully acknowledge the mercy which ameliorates the world about us and makes its conditions gentler; but we must hold firmly the truth that the rough wind is stayed in the day of His east wind, chiefly through the sanctification and exaltation of the human mind in Christ Jesus. Here we often err. We plead for the rectification and amelioration of circumstances; that our path may be smoother, our load lighter, our sky brighter. We are anxious for better health, improved trade, the restoration of friends, the reduction of life's cares, griefs and losses. We want life tempering by making our environment less exhaustive; by adjusting the world more nearly to our weakness. But this is not God's most approved method. He does not modify

the universe about us so much as He raises the mind within us; giving us relief and victory in knowledge, power, faith, hope, love, and the joy which is inseparable from a soul so richly dowered. 'In the day when I cried thou answeredst me and strengthenedst me with *strength in my soul.*' The sore persecution, the bitter pain, the unresolvable mystery, the struggle for life, continued in full force, but the inward man exulted in new-born triumphant might. This is Heaven's chosen method of mitigating and extinguishing the sorrows of mankind. 'There was given to me a thorn in the flesh . . . for this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' The whole truth is here; we must be as anxious for more grace as for fewer thorns. It is well when God in His power and mercy stills in any wise the storm which rages around us; it is well also, we dare to think better, when in the majesty of the mind we are sublimely unconscious of, or indifferent to the tempestuousness of life, as Jesus slept in the storm. There are several lessons here not to be overlooked.

1. We gain at this point an affecting view of the love of God. That love is never revealed more touchingly than in such passages as that before us. The love of a parent to his child is not so manifest when arraying his offspring in a coat of many colours,

amusing it with glittering toys, feasting it with delicacies; but rather does that love declare itself most convincingly when there is a tear in the chiding voice and a strange hesitancy in the uplifted hand. Thus we see only the surface of God's love whilst He feeds us, clothes us, pours around us the brilliant sunshine of a temporal prosperity, but we glimpse the ocean-depth of His heart as we watch His mercy struggling with His anger, His gentleness tempering His severity, His love and pity moderating the stroke of His hand. 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.' 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.' 'In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it: He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind.' In passages of this order do we feel the reality and tenderness of that Divine love which enfolds us, asking only the response of our heart.

2. We see in this a reason for submission and gratitude. How natural for us to dwell upon our limitations and losses! We see what is missed or lost, and strangely neglect what God's bounty has reserved to us. We must meditate more upon what we have, than upon what we have not; upon what is left, rather than upon what is taken. Plants of great splendour have usually little fragrance, and

plants of much fragrance usually little colour; birds of brilliant plumage have no music, and musical birds little glory of feather; strong animals ordinarily lack speed, swift animals strength. Now that would be a very disordered state of things in which the brilliant plant ever grieved over its defect of sweetness, and the sweet flower its lack of colour; in which the bird of paradise should lament its vocalism, and the nightingale sigh over its plumes; in which the camel should fret its slowness, and the gazelle deplore its frailty. And yet this error is common to man. We look on the side of our limitations and bereavements, quite overlooking or undervaluing the particulars in which we are rich or strong. We say sometimes, and think it quite an heroic concession: 'It is not so bad but it might have been worse.' 'Worse,' indeed, and usually a great deal worse. We little know how rich we are; how much we have to lose; how easily we might have sorrow upon sorrow. God has taken something from us in His displeasure, but He has left more. He has taken much from us not in displeasure, but in the merciful discipline which sacrifices our secondary interests to our highest, but He has left more. We thank Him for His 'sparing mercies,' and not without reason, for if we should count them they are more in number than the sands of the sea. In all the deprivations of the race, in all our personal losses and sorrows, mercy has prevailed, and we have not

been utterly wasted. Like that of Jonathan's, one end of God's rod is dipped in honey.

3. We see the justification of confidence and quietness. There can be no rational confidence and repose in men who believe not in a personal God ruling the universe to moral ends. They see only vast machinery driven by blind forces—purposeless, merciless. In their terrible universe with its rigid laws and mechanical movements, there is no place for accommodations, abatements and compensations, no possible adjustments to the individual weaknesses and wants. The philosophy of the world given in the text is far more comforting. Here we see a plastic universe in the hand of an indulgent, discriminating Ruler, Who moves and modifies all things to the perfecting of each and all His children. How picturesque and assuring the Prophet's statement of this truth in another place! 'For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart-wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen. This also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.' The truth is here that men and nations require special treatment: that a gentler discipline is necessary for tender kinds of fruit, and a sterner instrument and

severer dealing for those of more obdurate type. The truth is here also, that He will not ever thresh, neither will He break or bruise the spirit of His people. 'He is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working,' distinguishing between soul and soul; and subjecting each to that wise and merciful discipline by which they shall be best discharged from husks of sin, and as pure golden fruit be gathered home. Surely we may rest with a quiet confidence in the hands of Him who knows us so well, Who gives no unnecessary pain, and Who works so surely to ends so grand.

4. Let us go forth again with renewed courage and hope. It is said of the righteous: 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' But our poor weak nature betrays us, and we are apt to dip into the future and return very dispirited. It is generally allowed that Dante has pictured *Inferno* more ably than *Paradiso;* and the critics explain this on the ground that the poet's gloomy genius made him more skilful in depicting a dark theme than a cheerful one. The measure of Dante's genius is rare; the kind very common indeed. Most of us are clever at painting black pictures. We peep into the future and start back aghast. We see fires through which we must pass; raging floods we must cross; steeps we must climb. We think of graves by the side of which we must stand; of one which we shall have to fill; and our soul melts for

heaviness. Now this apprehensiveness saps the soul and fills life with vague bitter distress. Schopenhauer's favourite quotation was, 'It's safer trusting fear than faith,' but the history of every grand character and movement from the beginning gives the lie to this aphorism; the strength of the soul and the victory of life is in lofty faith and hope, and we have deep, wide foundations for a great comforting inspiring trust. Courage! the silver thread shall run through the whole web of life. Courage! there shall be no Marah of bitterness, but some sweetening tree grows by its side. Courage! in your darkest sky shall shine the morning star.

'I cannot go
Where UNIVERSAL LOVE smiles not around,
Sustaining all yon orbs, and all their sons;
From seeming evil still educing good,
And better thence again, and better still,
In infinite progression.'

III.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF LIFE.

'What is your life? For ye are a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.'—JAMES iv. 14. (R.V.)

IT was no part of the Apostle's intention to teach that life is necessarily vain, empty and perishing; he suggests that life is what we make it, accordingly as we live to the 'outer man' which 'perisheth,' or to 'the inward man' which 'is renewed day by day.'

I. 'A vapour'—yet a vapour may be a thing of glory or gloom. A vapour is often an object of glory, of richest glory. Mr. Ruskin complains: 'It is a strange thing how little in general people know about the sky.' People in general may know more about the sky than art critics suppose. Akenside's rustic charmed with the sunset's scarlet stain, is no mere fancy of a poet, for deep in the heart of man is the love of beauty, and many wondering glances do the common people cast upon the glory of the world. But we may readily concede that fixing our anxious eyes too much on the earth we miss many grand spectacles in the sky. The firmament is the Royal Academy of God, glorified with countless masterpieces

of form and colour. The transfiguring touch of the Divine hand changes the pliant vapour into rich sculptures, superb architecture and pictures of matchless grace or grandeur. The 'vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away,' is a fountain of perennial delight to poet and painter: it calls up our thought to the glory of Heaven, to the glory of God. A vapour may also be a cloud—dense, dark and forbidding. It may obscure the light, discolour the sky, mar the summer. Thus with human life—it also may be a thing of glory or gloom. Some lives are as the cloud which lies on the sky, an inky blot; whilst other lives in their brightness and beauty remind us of those rainbow scraps which are very jewels on heaven's bosom.

What makes the difference in the vapour? The sun. The orb of day dyes the vapours with colour, warms them with fire, illuminates them with brightness, and fills the depths with shifting scenes of splendour. What the sun is to the vapour, God is to our life; and life shines or saddens according to its relation to Him. Every one will feel that the parties referred to in the context are anything but noble characters. 'Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain.' There is nothing sublime here. All is poor, coarse, commonplace enough. We instinctively feel this type of life lacks depth and dignity, and must therefore lack the pure

satisfaction of ideal life. The Apostle reminds us of the missing element: 'For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that.' The missing element is godliness. God was not in their thought, their affection, their purpose, and the gold of life was changed to clay. 'The Lord God is a sun'; and our lives shine—everything in us and about us shines—just as we keep in the stream of His brightness. Acquaintance with God gives life its purity. The vapour apart from the sun is foul and dark; but as the light pierces it, it becomes 'white as white wool,' 'white as snow.' As we set the Lord God before us and live in fellowship with Him the baser elements of life are purged, and we attain that purity of heart which is the condition of all joy and glory. In the identification of ourselves with God life acquires sublimity. The vapour in itself—void, variable, vanishing—is singularly destitute of all characters of greatness and grandeur, but the same vapour in the sun acquires the sublimity of the cloud and the loveliness of the rainbow. Thus as we realize the existence of God, the will of God, the love of God, does life lose its ignoble and disappointing characters, and become rich in all glorious elements, unutterably suggestive and sublime. And through the knowledge and service of God life attains fruition in full felicity. The sunless vapour is that murky weeping cloud which is the chosen image of misery, whilst the sun-smitten vapour spreads a smile

on the face of day. Life so strangely sad in itself kindles into rapture as it drinks the light of the Throne.

If our life is to be beautiful and blessed, we must place it on the right basis. Look at the vapour when it trails along the earth—cold, ashen, bewildering, unwholesome, choking, deadly! But see the same vapour drawn up into heaven, see it glowing with the coloured brightness of gold and beryl, topaz, chrysolyte and sapphire, and you might think it the holy city that John saw having the glory of God and whose light was like a jasper-stone, clear as crystal. Human life is nothing until you lift it into the sky. Our great fault is that we live near the ground, and therefore is our life full of perplexity and sadness. Let us mount nearer heaven, and the rich and strange shall become familiar; our soul shall be pure, our path luminous, our hope sublime, our joy full. Drawing near to God men are startled to discover that that life of theirs which appears so inexpressibly vain and sombre, and which threatens to dissolve in a rain of tears into that mystic ocean from whence in a rain of tears it arose, is intrinsically so precious, capable of such infinite delights and destined to such abiding glory. 'Nearer, my God, to Thee; nearer to Thee'; and this blank, stained, confused, tearsome life of mine shall reveal Thy holiness and blessedness, as the vapour becomes a prism to the sun; and all the things which accompany life shall shine as shines the morning star.

II. 'A vapour'—and yet a vapour may be the source of barrenness or blessing. Indeed a vapour may be one of three things. It may be the source of blasting, as the sulphurous vapour of the thunder-cloud. This is true of some lives; they are only pernicious and destructive. The course of many who pass through the world may be traced by the havoc they work. Or, the vapour may be a merely barren thing. Not working any particular and obvious mischief, only drifting before the wind in barren magnificence. Thus is it with many lives. Men live for garish pride, or rosy pleasure, or golden gain, or crimson greatness; the earth is no better for their presence, they work no private or public service. These serve not their own generation 'according to the will of God'; they serve themselves according to their own will. Or, the vapour may be a source of rich and lasting blessing: the messenger of God, scattering showers of blessing. Thus devoted souls pass through society rich in precious and holy influence; they drop as the rain and distil as the dew, and when they have passed out of sight you trace their passage by the rising flowers. If life is to be noble and blessed it must not be hurtful, not neutral, but beneficent. The parties indicated by the Apostle in our text are selfish as well as godless. 'We will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain.' It is all traffic and lucre—the water-spout which gathers into itself, not the cloud dropping

fatness. This selfishness ruins life utterly. We only become honourable and blessed in giving as we get, serving as we enjoy. And it is comforting to remember that this most evanescent life may be so richly, widely and enduringly made a blessing. Many of those passages which so pathetically express the transientness of life, and which we quote with extreme mournfulness, have quite another side to them, and it is well to turn them round and refresh ourselves with their sunnier significance. Job has many of these metaphors.

'My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle' (vii. 6). His days pass swiftly as the little shuttle passes backwards and forwards in the warp. How often do we sorrowfully note the same aspect of life! Hours, days, weeks, months, years pass with confusing rapidity; and we are apt to infer that little can be done or attempted with such conditions. Are we not mistaken here? Swift is the action of the weaver's shuttle, yet each rapid movement may fix a thread of silk or gold which shall keep its beauty for ages in royal robe or tapestry. Thus each fleeting moment may see some shining thread shot into the world's raiment or ours, if we are only wise workers in the loom of life. There is needful admonition, perhaps, in the poet's somewhat dismal reminder:

'How swift the shuttle flies which weaves our shroud!'

yet will it be healthier and more stimulative—there-

fore more Christian—to remember, how swift the shuttle flies which weaves the rich vesture of the kings to all eternity, the shining raiment of the Bride the Lamb's Wife.

'O remember that my life is wind' (vii. 7). A breath, a passing breeze! And yet the vanishing breath may utter great thoughts and kind words to the joy and purifying of multitudes. The passing breeze will freshen the stagnant flood, lift the unhealthy fog, awaken music in the stirred branches, and fill the whole landscape with animation and freshness; thus a human life may pass as the wind, leaving the whole face of the community refreshed and vitalized. Our life may be wind, yet may it be one with that mighty rushing wind which came down at Pentecost, sweetening the world.

'My days are swifter than a post' (ix. 25). 'My days hurry onwards more swiftly than a runner.' The poet had in view such a runner as carried the commands of the Court into remote provinces, such a runner as preceded the carriages of kings and great public officers. Thus our days, 'swift as a post,' are yet full of significance and grandeur! It has pleased God during the current year to bereave our Church of Ministers of most remarkable gifts, and several of these have been taken in the prime of glorious manhood. They were with us yesterday, shapes instinct with life, with bright eyes, lips touched with fire, feet swift and beautiful, hasting with the tidings of salvation, the message of peace;

and now they have vanished, their eloquence dying away into the silence of the grave. Most keenly do we realize in the presence of these events the uncertainty and evanescence of life, feeling our days to be a handbreadth, our 'age as nothing.' Yet is there another side to all this. These departed ones who were 'the messengers of the Churches and the glory of Christ,' wrought grand things in few days. 'Swift as a post,' what sweet messages of peace and life they spoke to thousands ere they finished their course; how successfully they proclaimed the coming of the King and made smooth the way for His chariot! So, in our measure, may it be with us all.

'My days . . . are passed away as the swift ships' (ix. 26). Yes, but what treasures the swift ships bring; what treasures the swift ships take! 'The merchandize of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour and wheat . . . All things which were dainty and goodly.' So is it with the 'ships of reed'—these frail, swift human lives of ours. What treasures these swift ships bring! They come from God freighted with riches of intellect, feeling, utterance, to enrich and rejoice the world. What treasures these swift ships take! Rich results of sanctified sorrow, of spiri-

tual industry, of high duty bravely done, of years of consecrated toil and thought, of pain and blessing, of faith and love and prayer. We grieve to see the white sails vanishing like white wings into the infinite blue; but we must not forget that these weather-stained argosies—built in the noon and rigged with blessings bright—have steered straight into port with mystic treasures which 'wax not old,' 'eternal in the heavens.'

'He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down' (xiv. 2). The flower cut down is a sweet thing still, and short-lived service leaves lasting fragrance:

> 'A sweet perfume still lingering
> In essence pure, and living thus
> In blessedness about the spot,
> When rose, and bush, and bloom are not.'

The virtue of a vanished life abides in the heart and mind of men working subtilely to most gracious issues; the ashes are strewn, yet the glow abides; the strings are broken, yet the music lingers; the flower withers, yet the healing leaves stored in secret places distil sweetness and life.

'Our days . . . are as a shadow, and there is none abiding,' is the complaint of David—a complaint finding many an echo in Sacred Writ and in the writings of all times. No image sets forth the unsubstantial and precipitate character of life more affectingly. Psalmist, poet, moralist have gazed on the thin, wasting mocking image on the wall or ground, and found in it the closest emblem of this mortal story. And yet

is there not another side even to this figure, usually considered altogether sad? Is it not the choice metaphor to set forth most precious aspects of the Divine power and government? 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the *shadow* of the Almighty.' 'And a Man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the *shadow* of a great rock in a weary land.' How much the 'shadow' means here! how much comfort, succour, rest, safety! Cannot we make our brief life after this same pattern? And if we embody, as far as may be, the perfections of the redeeming God, who can measure the blessing that may spring out of our career?

Finally, take the figure in our text: 'A vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.' Life escapes us like melting mist, and we see it vanish with amazement and distress. Still the vanishing vapour leaves beautiful and lasting effects. Whence the green pasture, the leaf-robed forestry, the rich vineyard, the bowing wealth of corn, the orchards full of ripeness? Are they not all the offspring of vapours that appear 'for a little time, and then vanish away'? So the world of noble things and institutions about us —the wilderness blossoming as the rose—is the result of short lives inspired by holy feeling, devoted to high ends.

The Christian must regard his ephemeral life from this point of view. The worldly life is in some respects painfully long, in others painfully short, but the

Christ-like life meets every rational desire and aspiration. How wide-reaching is the influence of a hallowed life! We know how far-reaching movements are in the physical world. A pebble dropped in the middle of a lake, the ripple is repeated to the shore; and just as surely any disturbance of the natural forces spreads to the outermost limit of the material universe. So in the world of mind and life—all lives are influenced by one life, as one life is influenced by all lives; and he who acts a noble part gives an impulse to society whose only limit is the habitable parts of the earth. How permanent are the results of a devoted life! We see the slight, swift phenomena of the world find abiding existence in the more enduring forms and forces of nature—the dewdrop exists in the flower, the glancing sunbeam in the forest tree, the shower in the green landscape; and so our passing thought, feeling, effort exists for evermore in the indestructible life of those whom we influence, and those who again are influenced by them in endless series. A path which leads to St. Leven's Rocks, tradition says, owes its special greenness to the fact that St. Leven once walked thereon. The pretty tradition reflects a great truth: the life of the good survives to distant generations. Each hasting pilgrim leaves a track of beauty where he stepped, and thus the earth is being restored to God.

The apparently void, perishing vapour is really most substantial; so far from being feeble, it is the force with which God drives the mighty machinery of the

world; it is as lasting as the rock. So this apparently poor, weak, dying life hides the very reality of things; it throbs with a boundless, exhaustless energy; it walks eternity. Our mistake is, that we view life as bounded by a few days and complete in itself, instead of regarding it as a period of rich beginnings which shall spread boundlessly, and which shall go on in beneficent action when the stars have gone out.

III. 'A vapour'—yet a vapour may end in a drain or a rainbow. The rain and the snow come down from heaven with differing destinies. Sometimes the rain trickles into the pure mountain-stream, refreshes the grass and flower, and runs with music into the sea; again, the heaven-distilling vapour falls into miry places and runs in unclean channels to the black underground. The snow may fall on Alpine ranges, retaining long its driven whiteness and shining with strange splendour in the sun, or it may be trampled in the city streets. So widely contrasted is the destiny of that self-determining vapour—human life. In the text we see men living without any recognition of the relation of this life to immortality. Giving themselves to life on its physical and human side, they lose all clearness and brightness of soul, the stream ever becoming more turbid as it flows. 'And Jesus spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This

will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke xii. 16-21). This man's life ran in the gutter, and ended in the sewer. It is whilst we regard these fleeting days in their relation to the will of God that we penetrate their grandeur and become conscious of exaltation. 'That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him: *for He is thy life, and the length of thy days*' (Deut. xxx. 20). 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever' (1 John ii. 16, 17). It is whilst we regard the eternal meaning of life that all the discipline of this world develops greatness and purity of spirit. 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment,' and every other light thing which is but for a moment 'worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; *while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen*' (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18).

The legend of the American Indians declares that as the flowers fade in forest and prairie their lost beauty is gathered into the rainbow, and thus they glow again in richer colour than before. It is however no legend which teaches the perpetuity of moral excellence. The earth is always being made the poorer by the departure of those whom we so sincerely admired or passionately loved—those who were ornaments of society, the pride of the Church, the light of our home. Now some white lily is plucked from the nursery; now another is cut down:

> 'When youth its pride of beauty shows,
> Fairer than spring the colours shine,
> And sweeter than the virgin rose';

whilst others in ripeness of life and maturity of beauty are borne from before our weeping eyes. But these are neither lost nor injured: We look up to see them shine forth again in added grace and glory in the rainbow round about the Throne. Let us live in constant acknowledgment of God; let us, so far from accommodating ourselves to the fashion of a world which passeth away, identify ourselves with the will of God; let us thoroughly realize our sonship with God, our heirship of heaven; so shall we feel that we are being purified from every grossness, that we are being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, that we are becoming transfigured members in that ring of glory of which the Lord God and the Lamb are the eternal centre.

IV.

PERFECT PEACE.

'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.'—Isa. xxvi. 3, 4.

PEACE is the balance of a thousand forces in that centre of all things—the human heart; and, if we regard the question apart from revelation, such a balance seems quite unattainable. History discovers the successive generations plagued by inquietudes—mental, moral and political. And the most popular philosophy in the world, taking for its basis the common experience of mankind, teaches that peace is logically impossible; that all nature is full of blind and endless striving; that existence means desire, and desire means misery; that thus the world and life are fundamentally and essentially evil, and there is no escape from discontent, except in insensibility and extinction. In opposition to all this, revelation teaches that the world is a cosmos, not a chaos; that human nature is intrinsically noble and only accidentally base; and that the Lord Jesus Christ waits to restore the

lost balance in the heart of all who trust in Him, bringing their life into accord with the infinite music of God's perfect universe. Let us trace the method of His operation in securing to us the peace which passeth understanding.

1. There is the antagonism between our *conscience* and *history*. We recall all we have been and done, and of how little in past years can an instructed conscience approve! Life's golden dawn dimmed by folly, stained by excess; gifts of understanding, health, position, culture, influence, run to waste; the fruits of primal years only things of which 'we are now ashamed'; the pure delights of the mind bartered for indulgences whose remembrance is a sigh; the great meaning of existence utterly missed; the eloquence of reason and conscience drowned in sensual excitements and vain pursuits; the grace of God resisted and extinguished; so much that was flagrantly, shamefully wrong; so much that was fair in seeming, false in essence; such is the heart-breaking retrospect:

> 'O! the dark days of vanity! while here,
> How tasteless! and how terrible, when gone!'

From a certain historical character came the sad outburst: 'My whole life has been one great mistake'; and this confession is wrung from all when the law comes home and we know ourselves as we are known of God. Not simply an intellectual mistake to be condoned on grounds of infirmity, but a profound moral

mistake also, for which we are and ought to be accountable. Now there can be no rational peace until we are freed from this dead, accusing past; until the antagonism of conscience and history ends in some worthy pacification. Here Christ becomes most precious to all who believe. We cannot live the past over again; we cannot undo its misdoings; we cannot restore the wasted wealth of life and grace; we cannot atone for our foolishness and wickedness; and therefore helplessly crushed under the burden of our sin and sorrow, He Who of His own free grace bore our curse and shame speaks forgiveness and peace into the contrite soul. This peace in Christ is of the noblest. The law of heaven is not relaxed one jot or tittle. Neither is the tone of conscience lowered to ensure us peace, but, on the contrary, He Who gives us a new heart gives us a new conscience; conscience in evangelical penitence becomes more acute and authoritative than ever, and yet in its utmost majesty and tenderness is satisfied with God's reconciling work and word in Jesus Christ. And as this peace is 'perfect' in quality, so is it perfect in the sense of completeness, thoroughness. The gifts and sacrifices of the law could not make 'perfect, as pertaining to the conscience'; but 'the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God,' does thus make perfect, purging our 'conscience from dead works to serve the living God.' In Jesus our hearts are 'sprinkled from an evil conscience,' *i.e.*,

from the consciousness of evil. 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.' Fixing our eye on the redeeming God, the guilty past vanishes, and eternal sunshine streams on the soul.

And yet how few pardoned ones have entered into the enjoyment of 'perfect' peace! 'Being justified by faith, let us have peace with God.' Peace is the privilege of all justified souls, but through unbelief we may stay short of the full blessing; and, alas! many do thus stay short. The measure of our faith in the pardoning God is the measure of our peace, and the hesitancy in our faith is the secret of our unrest. We do not wholly trust the Almighty love and grace; therefore is our peace faint and precarious as a lunar bow, when it might be all-embracing and majestic as the sign God fixed in the clouds, or that 'rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.' Dr. Büschel tells of an old man under strong conviction of sin who could not find peace. 'I met him once weeping in the fields; and when I asked him whether he could not believe that the blood of the Lord Jesus had power enough to save him, he replied: "Yes, I do believe it; but the lost years cry out behind me, the lost years, the lost years!"' (*My Ministerial Experiences*). Many who believe in Christ are troubled as this hoary penitent was. Beholding, 'the Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sin of the world,' yet are they harassed by the memories of guilty years. They

believe and do not believe, and this vacillation and feebleness of faith interrupts the sweetness of trustful life with many a parenthesis of woe. Consciously in the City of Refuge, we yet tremble as if the avenger of blood were upon us; He has blotted out the handwriting that was against us, and yet with perverse ingenuity we peer through the blot and spell out once more the cancelled indictment; He has cast our sins *behind His back*, that nothing might come between us and the light of His face, yet we creep into the dark background and terrify ourselves with ghastly memories; He has cast our sins into 'the depths of the sea,' yet we will not let them rest there, but must be ever fishing up stark fragments of God-forgotten days and years. 'Thy sins are forgiven *thee*.' Oh! can we believe it? *My* sins pardoned; *all* my sins pardoned; all pardoned for *ever!* Can we believe He means what He says? means it all? 'O! joy surpassing fable and yet true.' Let us grasp and hold the gracious doctrine with a daring confidence, and there shall rest on our soul the hush of the everlasting hills, the silence of a stormless firmament.

2. The second serious antagonism of life is that between our *flesh* and *spirit*. The Apostle describes this feud in language which brings the sad fact home irresistibly. 'For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.'

This is the fundamental, fatal discord. Our nature is not one, but two—the law of the mind, the law of the members. Here we get to 'the law of storms'—the very source and secret of life's unrest. Wilder hurricanes than ever sweep the Atlantic; hotter siroccos than ever blaze over the Sahara; deadlier whirlwinds than ever wreck Oriental city, rage in the breast of man, and the law in our members which wars against the law of the mind is the source of all this conflict, passion and pain. There can be no true peace until this internecine war ends in the utter breaking down and final extinction of the law in our members. The supremacy of the flesh would not ensure rest; such triumphant usurpation would bring all hell with it Any alliance between the rival powers is also impossible. They greatly err who argue that the law in the members and the law of the mind are simply disturbed polarities of our nature between which harmony may be established; that they correspond to the antithetical laws we find in creation, and whose just mutual action is altogether beneficent. That conflict of the soul in which all other fightings—elemental, national, or social—have their origin, and out of which spring the manifold miseries of human life, is not the result of powers, properties and laws altogether good and pure having fallen through ignorance and accident into displacement and misrelation, and needing only the correction of culture; but our nature has lost its purity, that is, its homogeneity; an exotic element, an alien power, an

abnormal law has found place within us, working our destruction, and this the grace of God only can master and extirpate. 'Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' 'First pure, then peaceable'; this is the order of Christ. The peace Christ gives is, as we said, noble and profound, and here we have another illustration of this. The soul is not soothed by some anodyne, or lulled by some lullaby, as the world gives peace; but our breast is cleansed of the mystic poison which works so disastrously. Christ pours into us the light, energy, joy of His own glorious nature, breaking the tyranny of the law in the members, giving ascendency to the law of the mind, and thus brings back the paradisiacal calm. Perfect peace goes with perfect purity, always goes with it, and is not found elsewhere.

But many who believe in Christ have not proved this 'perfect' peace. They do know peace, but it is fitful and periodic—easily ruffled, easily destroyed. And a little short of 'perfect' peace is a matter of singular moment. When you have a really calm sea, what rare things the placid waters reveal! sculptured coral, whorled shells, iridescent fish, pearls—snowflakes of the deep not one moment white but white for ever, gems whose strange fire the floods cannot quench, with glorious plants and blossoms, as if the silver water mirrored the flowers of heaven as well as its stars. And what rare things the unstirred sea reflects!

the ambient blue, with all its treasures of light and colour; the devious coast, with all its fantasy of rock forestry and mountain. But let one ripple pass over the glassy tide, and the matchless spectacle is sadly marred. So in 'perfect' peace we realize the glory of our own being, the glory of higher worlds, as no language can tell; but the first ripple of passion, or care, or doubt, spoils the magic of the picture and the joy. What is the cause of our superficial and intermittent peace, but our imperfect realization of Christ's purifying power? There is yet left in us so much of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; and a relic of the carnal element undestroyed makes all the difference. A little rift in the lute spoils a world of music; a microscopic speck in the eye blurs skies, seas and suns; and the least of that hateful thing sometimes called sin, sometimes lust, sometimes self, allowed to linger in the heart defrauds us of unutterable satisfaction. Perfection is separated from imperfection by what in our rough reckoning is a trifle, yet what a world of difference that trifle makes! The veriest missing of perfection is the missing of that compared with which all the rest is poor. 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.' This is the truth we need to grasp—entire sanctification in the everlasting strength of our redeeming Lord. 'I am the Almighty God;

walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' O! could we once believe it, not one evil thought should remain, and our peace flow as a river. Let us look from ourselves to our Almighty Redeemer; let us stay on Him with the faith that laughs at impossibilities, and He shall at once make our raiment whiter than snow, and crown our brow with an olive wreath in which is hidden no sprig of cypress or of thorn.

3. A further antagonism of life is that between *feeling* and *reason*. One of the most painful and perplexing phases of life is the conflict between instinct and logic; our reflective reason contradicting our spontaneous reason on many of the greatest questions of existence. Listening to our heart we receive most consolatory and inspiring assurances, whilst our understanding arrives at other and far sadder conclusions. Our heart reveals God as the Creator and Preserver of us all, its testimony being as emphatic as it is precious, and yet our experience often seems to clash with sensibility, and we cry with Job: 'Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him.' A primitive intuition apprehends the goodness of the Supreme, but the intellect pondering this sad world cannot confirm the intuition. A constitutional principle prompts us to prayer implies, the intervention of God in all our affairs and the

validity of supplication, yet our dialectics often disown our devotions, and it seems as unphilosophical to pray as it is natural. Our consciousness assures us of our freedom and responsibility, giving grandeur to thought and life; but science contradicts consciousness, degrading us into mere mechanism. The fact of immortality is a truth found in the depth of our mind, a glorious instinctive hope lending the colour of gold to all the sphere; but science is at variance with sentiment; and we look into the black grave with dismay. If we dare trust that feeling in us which is at once deep, noble and positive, we could welcome all the glorious articles of the creed and rest in them with unmixed delight, but reason enters another verdict, and we are overwhelmed in the dilemma. How deep the grief of many who vividly realize these enigmas cannot be told. In all ages men have sorrowfully brooded over these contradictions, and in no age have they been more keenly felt than in our own.

Here, once more, Christ is our peace, giving us rest by giving us light. Christ is not called 'The Light of the world' without reason; He gives us fresh truth and hope. We are far from asserting that the New Testament formally harmonizes syllogism and sentiment, that it demonstrates agreement between intuitionalism and rationalism; but it suspends the bitter polemic by mightily reinforcing the brightest convictions and aspirations of our nature. It shows us the greatest, wisest, holiest Teacher the world has ever

seen—He Who spake as never man spake—giving direct and ample authentication to the grand creed of the heart; and this is surely an adequate reason for waiting in hope the final solution of the apparent antagonism between feeling and philosophy. Christ beat the music out, and by His side we need feel no more perplexity. Anxious about the Divine character, read: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Doubtful about prayer: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' If the problem of suffering frets us, we have His interpretation: 'Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' If we have any scruples about man's place in nature, His whole career is the supreme demonstration of the moral dignity of the race. And what rational doubt can we have of immortality after listening to His farewell: 'In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.' Christ has established a truce between reason and faith by giving reason the most solemn pledges that when the final light breaks forth we shall find all the most glorious hopes of the soul far more than realized. All who believe in Christ wait with assured confidence and imperturbable peace.

But here also many who believe in Christ have not the 'perfect' peace. That strange schism of brain and heart, whose bitter and endless disputation creates such grief in circles where Christ is not heard, is not entirely unknown in Christ's Church. We give place to this controversy, and our peace is put to flight. We argue these questions away from Christ, and our soul is troubled. 'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me.' Here Christ challenges our faith in Himself as Divine, and shall we not trust Him as such? trust Him utterly? 'God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken to us in His Son.' And shall we not give Him our fullest, heartiest confidence? O! how much we lose by wrestling with problems away from Christ! How much we lose by setting in any degree our imagination against His promise! It is perfectly quiet at the centre of the whirlwind. Jesus Christ is the centre of the whirlwind of modern controversy, and whilst our lame interpretations of the universe, our little systems of philosophy put forth with so much pride and hope, are being driven about and driven away like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, with Christ at the centre reason finds lasting quiet. 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.' Let us stay our mind on Him

in Whose face we see the glory of God, and He shall hide us in His pavilion from the strife of tongues.

4. The final antagonism of life is that of *character* and *circumstance.*

No sooner are we what we ought to be than we painfully feel the world is not what it ought to be, and the more nearly we are right the more we realize how deeply the world is wrong, and how hard a thing it is to carry into effect high principles and convictions. Life is one long severe trial. We are tried in every possible way—in principle, temper, affection and faith. It would seem here that the wicked never cease from troubling, the weary find no rest. Here again, however, Christ becomes our peace by giving us power. He makes us to share in His own triumphant spirit and might, thus enabling us to overcome the trial and temptation, the allurement and sorrow of life. We are filled with wisdom, love, power and joy as He was; therefore, whilst in the world we have tribulation, in Him we have peace. 'These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' And as the Apostle says: 'Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?' He who rests in Christ with an absolute faith proves perfect peace even in the midst of loss, persecution, tumult and death.

'Not a surge of worry,
Not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry
Touch the spirit there.'

How few in the friction and strain of this worldly life attain this 'perfect peace'! We have solicitude, fretfulness, misgiving and sorrow. And we explain this to ourselves by regarding our circumstances as specially harsh and afflictive, which is an explanation very wide of the truth. We set down our peevishness, soreness, doubtfulness as caused by the unpropitiousness of our lot, when it really springs far more from faults of character which grace has not cured. Mariners often fear the ground swell more than the tossing waves of the windy tempest; and the deepest distress of the soul is not caused so much by the passing trial which stirs the surface, as by irregularities in the deep places of our nature. The fact is, when our inner life is strong, pure and dispassionate, so far from the world projecting its disquiet into our bosom the stormy world about us seems to catch our serenity. What Milton says of

'the night
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the earth began,'

is true of the great, wild world in relation to all those in whom this same Jesus has set up His reign of light and purity:

'The winds, with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kist,
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmèd wave.'

No; the blame of our lack of peace is not to be laid on our severe environment, but on the inner defect of power which, in its turn, is caused by our qualified faith. If we fully identified ourselves with the world-conquering Christ, we should know no more irascibility or fear, but in fiery trials prove abiding equanimity and imperturbation.

The text is the key to this quiescent mood: 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.' Or the words of the Apostle: 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.' We must live a life of constant faith, ever looking into the heavens. A distinguished physician who recently died reminds us that there is no place where the grandeur, ambition and care of life are so thoroughly rebuked as in an Astronomical Observatory. 'As a practical illustration of this remark,' he continues, 'I would add that my own knowledge of astronomers—those who have themselves worked with the telescope—has shown them to be generally men of tranquil temperament, and less disturbed than others by worldly affairs, or

by the quarrels incident even to scientific research.' How likely this seems! Constantly dwelling on the magnitudes and magnificences of the firmament, the 'expressive silence' and splendour of the starry depths, their soul shared the grandeur and peace amid which they wrought, and became insensible to the petty ambitions and anxieties of the earth. Thus will it be with us—only in a far grander sense and measure—if we keep heaven opened to us, and dwell constantly on the sublime facts and hopes of that celestial realm where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. The successes of life shall not exalt us, its ambitions dazzle, its cares agitate, its sorrows crush us. Our peace will flow like a river into the stormless ocean of eternity.

V.

NARROW ESCAPES.

'But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped.'—PSALM lxxiii. 2.

THE victorious general in the hour of triumph has not unfrequently reason to remember how nearly, through oversight or miscalculation, he had lost the day: a little more pressure on this wing or that, a trifling prolongation of the struggle, a few minutes' further delay in the arrival of reinforcements,—and his proud banner had been dragged in the dust. The pilot guiding his barque safely into port sometimes knows how through lack of seamanship he nearly made shipwreck. And the successful merchant remembers crises in his history when he found himself on the brink of ruin, when the last straw only was wanting to precipitate the catastrophe. Men who have won the prizes of life have cause to wear their honours meekly when they recall the errors of judgment, the lack of courage, the acts of rashness, the ignorance, the credulousness, the hesitation, which so nearly deprived them of fame and fortune. Our religious history furnishes parallels to these narrow

escapes on the lower level; and it is our purpose to consider these hazardous passages in our spiritual life. We discuss:

1. The *occasions* of our peril.

Our soul is sometimes in imminent danger from *unbelief*. This was the peril of Asaph in the Psalm before us. Many of God's people find their faith severely tried, and hardly endure the trial. From various causes some are more liable to be troubled with the problems of the religious life than others, but the dark enigmas with which life is fraught have driven us all to our wit's end. We have, perhaps, been exercised on the Divine Existence. 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God'; and we have been close neighbours to the fool. There is in us also 'an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.' Or, we doubted the Divine Word. The difficulties of Revelation have thrust themselves upon us so overpoweringly that our faith was greatly shaken. Sometimes we have been hardly able to accept the doctrine of Divine Rule. Beholding the phenomena of society apparently contradicting the acknowledged principles of God's government, we have been sorely puzzled as Asaph was. Some have known the time when they were in danger of renouncing the Divine Redeemer. Yielding to a rationalizing spirit they were ready to deny the Lord Who bought them. And in dark hours we have doubted the Divine Promise, being staggered at the

hope of immortality. Sometimes these doubts have been pressed upon us from the outside by the disciples and literature of scepticism, at other times suggested by our own experience; and our soul fluttered in the fowler's net. It is noonday with us now, but we remember when the light was discoloured with eclipse and bordered on the shades of night; we live now in 'the full assurance of faith,' but our confidence was once attenuated as a spider's thread; our hope is full of glory, but once it well-nigh made us ashamed. Many Christians now fully established in the faith and hope of the Gospel may look down into the forbidding abyss of unbelief, and tremble to think how nearly they skirted its brink.

At other seasons our special danger has arisen from *worldliness*. The most spiritual of God's people may perchance remember when their heart was all but absorbed by the secular—the inner man forgotten in the outer, the eternal in the temporary, the love of the Father in the love of the world. This worldliness sometimes follows prosperity. Peaches, cherries, and other European fruit taken to Ceylon are said to grow freely and become evergreens in the summer climate, but they refuse any more to ripen their fruit. Have we not seen circumstances produce similar effects on character? Do not Christians transplanted into areas of affluence often lose their fruit-bearing virtue? 'The care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.' The

same effect sometimes follows the reduction of means and the increased severity of the struggle of life; the man feels the necessity of closer application to business, and what is given to the world is taken from God. 'I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.' How worldly prosperity does sometimes shine upon our eyes! In the mirage of the desert objects are said to become strangely distorted; a mud bank exhibiting the appearance of a magnificent city with domes and towers, a few stunted bushes are transformed into a forest of stately trees. Is not the world and its hollow fading distinctions thus transformed in our idle foolish fancy? We attach an importance to its treasures, praise, ambitions, pleasures, utterly false and exaggerated. Another peculiarity of the mirage repeats itself in the illusions of worldliness—although the traveller has been forewarned a thousand times of the deceptive power of the mirage, and has experienced its deceptiveness, yet he feels it almost impossible to resist the illusion. Thus, although deepest insights and indubitable experiences have assured us of the vanity of the worldly life, how ready we are again to be captivated by the ancient illusion! The Psalmist notifies this unhappy susceptibility of ours in this very Psalm: 'Therefore His people are turned after them, and at the full stream would slake their thirst.' (Ver. 10, Perowne's Translation.) God's people are drawn away from Him by the evil example of pro-

sperous sinners, and in their infatuation seek to drink from the flowing stream of sinful pleasures. 'Almost gone!' Little by little we yielded to the authority of worldly maxims, to the tyranny of worldly interests, to the indulgences of worldly society and pleasure. Prayer became infrequent and unreal; the house of God was neglected; the Scriptures lost their relish; the family altar was dropping stone by stone into the dust. Our experience now is the ending of this Psalm full of trust and triumph, full of God and glory, but we remember how nearly we yielded to the power of the world.

Again, our peril has been actual *immorality*. We have trembled on the verge of positive evil. How nearly betrayed by passion, appetite, covetousness, pride: the partition thin between us and the fallen. The best, at one time or other, have been close neighbours to black sins. We have grazed rocks on which others were broken; slipped on brinks over which others fell; singed our wings in flames by which others perished. You hate an unclean imagination to-day, but once these imaginations found a far too welcome lodgment; an immoral word is impossible to your purged lip, yet the moment was when the fierce imprecation was all but spoken; godless society is now your aversion, but even since you feared God it had a charm which nearly mastered you; presumptuous sins do not now enter into your thought, and yet once there was but a step between you and worse than

death. Most Christian people know what the Scriptures mean by being 'scarcely saved.' At the 'Roll Call' of the Church many do not answer to their names at all, they have sunk ingloriously in the battle of life, vanquished by temptation and sin; others have suffered bad falls and ugly wounds; and such as have not sustained positive overthrow or palpable injury know how hazardously nigh they came to disaster, how nearly they had fallen under the hand of the adversary.

2. We ponder the *lessons* of our deliverance.

There can be no doubt about the first lesson, *Thankfulness.* All feel the signal propriety of giving thanks to God for narrow escapes from natural death, how much more shall we pour out before Him adoring gratitude for our escapes from spiritual ruin! The Divine Watcher comes to our rescue when we unconsciously and involuntarily place ourselves in danger, as we often do. In courses most honourable, with aims most praiseworthy, with high and unmixed motives, we make slips which might prove most disastrous. Our enthusiasm is beyond our ability; we carry into our work an unhappy bias; some constitutional flaw or mental obliquity causes aberration in judgment and action; our technical skill is not equal to our idea; our estimate of the situation is false; our heart is better than our head, our meaning than our method; and with intentions that God accepts, in paths quite legal, we blunder sadly.

Here the unslumbering Love screens and saves us. Bent on most righteous and even most magnanimous service, we fall into errors which might well work us loss and misery; but the Keeper of Israel pities our infirmity, and bears us up in His hands lest we dash our foot against a stone. Great is our debt of gratitude to Him Who renders our venial errors innocuous, who sustains us as we unwittingly step on slippery place or giddy brink; Who delivers us from our inexperience, short-sightedness and frailty, not permitting our infirmity to work its natural issue of woe. But the text brings into view another order of deliverances which ought to excite in us a yet livelier gratitude. The Psalmist recognises fully the wilfulness and guilt of the conduct which had brought him into such awful danger, and too often our danger comes out of our sin. Instead of resisting unbelieving thoughts in their very inception, in our pride we measured ourselves against insoluble problems and all but fell victims to our pride; instead of quenching the kindling spark of worldly love, we let it burn until it nearly burnt us; instead of turning our eyes from vanity, we contemplated evil until we meditated it. 'When I said, My foot slippeth; Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.' The Psalmist felt that the grand characteristic of God's intervention was not power or faithfulness, but mercy. That mercy has spared us. How nearly we came to undoing this glorious life, these happy days, these golden hopes! 'It is of the

Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.' 'Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto Thee. For Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not Thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?'

Another lesson we must take to heart is one of *Humiliation.* 'But as for *me*, my feet were almost gone.' The pronoun is emphatic. 'Even I, with all my knowledge and advantages, I who ought to have known better' (Calvin). When we remember the fulness of light, the strength of motive, the richness of grace against which we sinned and brought ourselves into jeopardy, we may justly be humbled. 'So brutish was I myself and ignorant, I became a very beast before Thee.' 'I, who ought to have lived the highest life of faith and purity, have fallen into this sottishness.' The Psalmist is amazed at himself; he can hardly believe he could have so far forgotten himself as to be ready to renounce godliness and hope, and declare: 'Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.' This fact overwhelms him with shame and sorrow. O how great the subtlety and power of sin! After having seen so often in clear vision the transcendent claim of spiritual truth, after vowing so solemnly allegiance to the Saviour, after proving so keenly the delights of the higher life, after feeling with mysterious and inexpressible satisfaction the powers of the world to

come; after all this to drop to the sceptical sensual level is a deep humiliation to the noble mind, and quite a revelation of the blinding power of sin.

> 'Tasting that the Lord is good,
> Pining then for poisoned food;
> At the fountains of the skies
> Craving creaturely supplies!'

Truly we can never know all the weakness and perfidiousness of our nature. How little can we trust ourselves! How profound and persistent the folly of our heart! Well may we plead: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'

A further obvious lesson is, *Caution.* Narrow escapes gender presumption in foolish men, but the wise are admonished. It is silly to imagine we bear a charmed life. Our presumption has not rarely been the occasion of our danger. Naturalists tell us that amongst birds and butterflies the swiftest, strongest flyers approach man much nearer than those with weaker wings, feeling confident that they can dart away from any threatened danger—and this misplaced confidence brings them into the net of the collector. How often have we indulged a confidence similarly inspired and similarly misplaced, being betrayed into the very shadow of doom? Have we not taken liberties with thought and life to our tremendous peril? Considering ourselves, marking the pitfalls of

the pathway, noting the foes of flesh and blood and the shadowy legions which throng the air, we cannot order our steps too warily. And we must not forget that our peril often lies most in things which threaten least. In mountain ranges there is often a loose *detritus* especially dangerous to mountaineers; these loose or crumbling stones being called 'the devil's stones,' for, owing to their treacherous character, if you step on one incautiously you may be precipitated into the depth. There are many such stones in the path of life. False maxims with sophistical colourings; license stealing the name of liberty; harmful speculations, luring as grand chances; methods of trade outlined square, yet full of betrayal; sandy doctrines simulating the rock; friendships which are flowery graves; occupations, recreations which promise rest and serve only to slip us into mire; these are the things of peril; life is full of them; and he only walks surely who walks discreetly. How often was that word 'Watch' on the Master's lips! 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.'

Sympathy is another precious lesson we must derive from these lapses. Having so narrowly escaped condemnation, we must think kindly and hopefully of those who went a little further, only a little further, and fell; having been so nearly run over, we must think tenderly of those who are carried to the hospital. Christians established in faith are sometimes exceedingly impatient and unsympathetic with those

who cannot find rest in the verities of Christianity. They look upon such as stupid and wicked. The sun shines so brightly, who can deny its existence? The glorious Gospel is so convincingly true and delightful, who can refuse its claims? But perhaps we did not always walk in the light. We were once tempted: 'How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?' Having ourselves tasted the wormwood and gall of unbelief, let us treat all troubled souls with deep brotherly tenderness. The matured spiritual Christian is also strongly disposed to severity with the Demas-type brother. He can hardly understand how any one can give place to such miserable worldliness; always needing looking after, stirring up, pulling out of the fire. Need we do more than recall our own seasons of unsteadfastness, coldness, barrenness? The things 'ready to die.' We know what that means. As we have looked at a shrub or tree nipped by winter or smitten by blight, and wondered whether it were alive or no, seeing here a rotten branch and there a sickly struggling bud, and are uncertain how it will go, so has it been with some of the stateliest, fruitfullest trees in God's garden—once and again it has been doubtful whether they would not wither away. We need only revert to our own strange lapses into grossness of spirit, and our heart will be moved towards those in peril from this source. We are in danger also of being harsh with those who fall into sin. We could hardly be thus unfeeling if

we remembered that near the pit we once rashly strayed—and happy are we if it has not been more than once. Sympathy is the secret of life. We shall effect more with erring men through sympathy than through logic, or scolding, or ecclesiastical penalty—sympathy is the all-subduing, all-inspiring, all-saving quality. And the Church wants more of this yearning pity, this winning grace. The Apostle Paul was full of sympathy with fallen, backsliding men, and the tear in his voice has made his eloquence move the hearts of generations. The memory of our personal frailty ought to make us tender. When Peter followed at a distance and denied his Lord, John was not far off, and John remembering his own flight could not be bitter on Peter who carried apostasy another stage. 'In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.'

Finally, our narrow escapes ought to teach us the importance of immediate and entire *Consecration to God.* The Christian course ought not to be a series of narrow escapes. True that course lies through endless dangers, but it need not, therefore, be a series of hairbreadth escapes: it is possible to run it with sure step and confident hope. The natural life is girt with danger; there is peril in the air we breathe, the food

we eat—peril above, around, beneath, in the midst of life we are in the midst of death. And yet we feel there is something thoroughly wrong with a man who is always recounting lucky escapes; we instinctively know that such an one is lacking in carefulness, sight, knowledge, coolness; there is a real and deplorable defect in him somewhere. Thus with our religious life—it is compassed with peril; and yet it is an abnormal state of things that the Christian should repeatedly be only just saved. Our life all round, our religious life especially, should be unhazarded. There is always a margin—not broad, perhaps, in one sense, but clear and distinct, and of almost infinite significance—between sane strength and the gulf. Where a Christian is ever stumbling and slipping there is a real weakness of character, a deep defect of mind or heart or will, a central lack of balance and force. What such of us need is to come to the Psalmist's conclusion—complete, final devotion to God. Let us thus yield ourselves to God, and these humiliating, dangerous episodes we shall know no more.

Let us dwell in the sanctuary. 'When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.' If he had gone into the sanctuary sooner and oftener, he would have found less pain and less peril. It is needful that we repair continually to God's altar; our faintings and failings often commence with the neglect of this duty. In such times our eye becomes

dim, our strength abates, our reasonings are false, our steps insecure. Every visit to the throne purges our vision, refreshes our soul, renews our strength. In communion with God we find the secret grounds of God's ways, and become able to await calmly and hopefully the solution of all painful problems. Worship, too, fills the soul with spiritual images and forces, preserving from the insidious encroachments of worldliness. And, faithful to our priestly privilege and purity, we shrink from contact with the unclean thing. We should falter less, if we prayed more; we should be safer in the world, if we were devouter in the temple. Let us also realize God's constant presence and aid. 'Nevertheless I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand.' It will make us strong and safe to keep our eye full of God. Let us implicitly accept God's Word. 'Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.' No more proud reasonings, but absolute confidence in the sacred oracle; in its principles, its patterns, its promises. This entire confidence in the Almighty Word imparts utmost firmness and power, and inspires sublime peace 'when the blast of the terrible ones' beats 'against the wall.' And let there be that full final joy in God that shuts out all rationalizing, carnal, worldly peril. 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside Thee.' His feet stand in a large place who has made this full surrender, and realized all the riches and comfort, all

the purity and hope it brings. Live thus, and the wretchedness of narrow escapes shall be known only as a troubled dream of the past. The fiery arrow shall not graze our skin, but be utterly quenched on our shield; our feet shall not slide, but stand secure as the everlasting rock itself; our barque shall not drift,

'Sails ripp'd, seams op'ning wide, and compass lost,

but ride safely over the stormiest sea receiving the abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom. 'Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen.'

VI.

THE BEST LOT THE COMMON LOT

'This honour have all His saints. Praise ye the Lord.'—PSALM cxlix. 9.

THE Church of the Lord Jesus is an aristocracy throughout; every member a peer with high and sacred privilege. We are afraid many Christians very imperfectly apprehend this truth, contenting themselves with inferior gifts and acquirements as if these were the appointments of God. They bring into the spiritual life the ideas and arrangements of the social sphere—where some are rich and others poor; some cultured, others illiterate; some illustrious, others unknown—and then proceed in their unbelief and false humility, without shame, to take the lowest place. Our present aim is to point out some of the choice gifts and privileges which pertain to all saints, but of which through mistaken ideas many deprive themselves; our anxiety is to encourage the most distrustful of God's people to claim the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ. We specify,

1. *Communion with God.* That all have a personal

and equal access to the Heavenly Father is a precious truth, strenuously claimed by all Protestants. We hold the fact and right of direct communication between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God, rejecting with horror the doctrine of a priesthood in which inhere singular and exclusive prerogatives of worship and intercession. But when intellectually free from the Roman Catholic error, do we not find ourselves accepting self-imposed limitations in fellowship with God which are quite at variance with the large, undistinguishing liberty which we have formally claimed? Many an error rejected in gross form reasserts itself in ghostly guise and does in some sort the evil it wrought before, and the Romish error of a privileged caste at God's altar still haunts the Protestant mind, and thousands fail to claim the fulness of the blessing in prayer and fellowship. We have no sooner thrust back the pontiff who dared to come between us and God, than our unbelief casts dark interceptive shadows between our spirit and the Throne.

Is not this manifest in many sincere souls who turn from the Lord's Supper, and, yielding to a sense of unworthiness, defraud themselves of most precious influences? Thousands from a sense of personal unworthiness touch not the sacramental cup, shutting themselves out from this fellowship with their dying Lord. They cheerfully acknowledge a fitness in others, whilst they sorrowfully fail to find that fitness

in themselves. 'This honour have all His saints.' Recall the institution of this festival. Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said: 'Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye *all* of it; for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' How much unworthiness in those disciples! Sceptical Thomas; Peter rash and weak; John with his passion, and all of them with a spot of cowardice in their hearts which was so soon to blacken in the fierce light which beat upon them! But the Master, looking beyond their faults and regarding the bright possibilities of each, invited them to this closest fellowship. 'And they all drank of it.' So let it be now. If Christ received only perfect ones to His table, He would sit there alone; but He receives sincere souls, whatever may be their faults, and sitting with Him they become perfect. In need of comfort, of faith, of purity and peace, of all that Christ can give so richly and waits to give so freely, let us not refuse the Master's welcome. When David's place was vacant at the royal table, Saul said: 'Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor to-day?' So when we absent ourselves from the Lord's table, a more gracious King than Israel's marks our empty place and sorrows to think we cannot trust His love and merit enough to be there.

And this same self-depreciation expresses itself in

the straitened supplication and lowered expectancy of many of God's people. The Old Testament is full of glorious records of the power of prayer; the New Testament is not less rich in similar instances; and we know still that God's ear is not heavy nor His arm shortened. Here, again, we bring in the idea of privilege, and limit marked answers to prayer and large answers to prayer to special men and extraordinary times. Yet is God's Word most clear in this matter, levelling all up to the open Throne. Listen to the charter: 'For verily I say unto you, That *whosoever* shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have *whatsoever* he saith.' Christ knows nothing of esoteric saints with strange rights to the golden censer. James is express on this point: 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was *a man subject to like passions as we are*, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.' The Holy Ghost, anticipating that we should explain away the Prophet's intercessional triumphs on the ground of his extraordinary endowments and mission, is careful to record that he participated in our weaknesses that we may be encouraged to dare

his victories. Nothing has been done in prayer but may be done again by us. As a kingdom of priests we all stand on the same platform, hold the same warrant, and 'the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.' We have swept away the priesthood that dared to obtrude between us and Heaven, but our weak, foolish heart has a priestcraft of its own, and guilty unbelief is ready to plant a whole hierarchy of black shadows between us and God, robbing us of the light and strength we sorely need. Let us drive these shadows hence also. In our sorrow, feebleness, want, danger, fear, any of us may come to God with the confidence of Moses, the importunity of Jacob, the undeniableness of Daniel, the sweet, filial freedom of Jesus Himself. Let us act like princes of God. 'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'

2. Concerning the *Influence of the Holy Spirit* we often entertain views at variance with the teaching of revelation. There is unquestionably much that is sovereign in the gifts and movements of the Spirit of God. Gifts of healing, utterance, interpretation, etc., are peculiar to certain epochs and persons. The Spirit divideth 'to every man severally as He will.' But the grandest influences of the Holy Ghost—His enlightening, quickening, purifying powers—are imparted without partiality. His sovereign gifts and appointments are secondary; His essential and choicer

influence is poured forth with undistinguishing richness on all receptive hearts. Take the Pentecost of the Jews, reported in Acts: 'And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it *sat upon each of them.* And they were *all filled* with the Holy Ghost.' The Pentecost of the Gentiles is similarly democratic: 'While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on *all them which heard the word.*' How much violence must be done to these accounts to get out of them any sanction for spiritual precedence and privilege? They teach most transparently that God is no Respecter of persons, but wherever a penitent receptive heart is found, there the free Spirit imparts His healing perfecting virtue.

It has been said by some that religion is a *talent*, and that we can no more demand that every man be religious than we can require every man to possess artistic or philosophic talent. This view, of course, all Christians would reject; but we retain the phantom of this error so far as we believe that some men have more religious capacity than others, that some have more 'genius' for religion than others. The belief that some natures are more eminently fitted for the reception and expression of the Spirit

of God than others is, in our opinion, a very serious misjudgment. Very earnestly ought we to combat the notion that Stephen, Barnabas or John, that Bernard, Luther or Pascal, that Fletcher or Pearce being of a singularly spiritual type of constitution belong to a category by themselves, and that in their super-exaltation they are only distantly related to ourselves. If we are less full than these men were of hallowed influence, of the serene of heaven, of a piercing faith, of pure magnanimity, of holy emotion and desire, of that strength and beauty of soul which charms and masters every beholder, the explanation must be sought not in the grounds of nature, but in our free faithless will. 'In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work.' No election of God, no finer or coarser constitutional fibre, lifts into light or dooms to degradation; all is determined by the measure of our consecration to God, by the heartiness of our holiness. Let us make the great surrender, let us live in resolute purity, and concealed depths of our nature shall be broken up, unsuspected powers evoked, latent forces and talents shall surprise us into greatness. Those who can hardly stammer a testimony shall become clear and bold as golden

trumpets filled with God's breath; the coldest glow as shining braziers full of live coals; the harshest characters become 'musical instruments, and that of all sorts'; the weak pottery strong and bright as adamant; the coarse, crooked instrument a polished shaft; and the vessels of wood and iron shall be transmuted into vessels of alabaster and gold full of incense and odours. Every one that asks may find; and, realizing the 'double portion of the Spirit,' there is no more meanness, weakness, or fear: 'In that day . . . he that is feeble among them shall be as David.'

3. We introduce the specializing idea into the doctrine of the *Witness of the Spirit.* Some theologians directly teach that, whilst the Spirit of God does assure the consciousness of some of their acceptance in Christ such assurance is by no means the privilege of all believers; and this position of formal theologians is unhappily conceded by many Christian people. Now, on what ground can we come to this conclusion? On the ground that some, whom we have strong reasons to consider God's children, never attain the happy consciousness? This certainly would be a mistaken method of reasoning. Not in a few things only, but in many things do God's children, through ignorance or unbelief or sloth, fail of their full privilege. Some few years ago there lived in the Metropolis a millionaire who imagined that his circumstances were straitened, and dreading

absolute poverty he allowed himself a pound a week, which was duly paid him by his own clerk. This type of hallucination is very common in the Church of God. In Christ measureless treasures have been made over to us, yet we dole them out to ourselves as if they were most limited and insecure. We are poor in feeling, in power, in faith, in hope and joy. In our streets of gold sits the moral Lazarus; at the banquet of God rings the cry of starvation; we turn the palace of the King into a workhouse. Nay, we can never read clearly and fully the rich grace of God in the experience of His saints; they too often fail to realize the fact and plenitude of the truth and power and righteousness which await them in Christ. The Word of God is our guide, and we confidently affirm it does not contain one word to justify us in confining this privilege of assurance to caste or class. 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' As many as are led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God; and as many as are sons of God have received the Spirit of adoption, or, if they have not received it, their error or unbelief has interrupted God's order. Any limitation must be foisted into the text. The blessing is not stinted,

occasional, local, specific, but constant, œcumenical, catholic, universal.

No souls call for deeper pity than those sincere ones who, for some reason or other, fail to realize with any clearness or steadiness the light of God's countenance. When 'Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem and saw not the king's face,' his soul was full of bitterness, and he said to Joab, 'Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me.' It is easy to imagine the misery of men situated like the disgraced son of the king. They witness joys they cannot share; are painfully sensitive and anxious without knowing whether they succeed or fail; come tantalizingly near to satisfactions they cannot taste; mix with grandeur without the sense of dignity; are close to power without the sense of security; associate with favourites without the sense of favour; live in a palace with the feelings of a captive. And thus with men alive to the religious sentiment, and keeping close to the Church of God without the sense of acceptance—they are ever conscious of painful contrasts, and in work and worship, in doing and suffering, in thought and life, are full of trouble. Robertson says: 'Mourning after an absent God is an evidence of love as strong as rejoicing in a present one,' but whatever truth may be in this,

there is no sorrow more profound or pathetic than the sorrow of the soul which fails to realize the love and friendship of God.

For each doubting soul there is assurance: a scroll for every bosom. The prodigal son moaned: 'I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants'; and this sentiment of mistrust is so deep in our heart we fail to see when the robe and ring are positively ours. Seek the sense of sonship as something belonging to you, waiting for you, and you shall not walk in darkness. Seek it with resolution. Absalom grew desperate at length to see the royal face, then obtained the necessary introduction, reconciliation followed, and 'the king kissed Absalom.' Some of us have been far more than two years in suspense and sadness; let us wait no longer, but plead for our privilege in this very hour.

4. In relation to *Entire Sanctification* we predicate the same distinction. A legend of the Jews relates that the Prophet Ezekiel once raised a number of his countrymen from the dead, but the miracle was so far imperfect that the resuscitated men ever after retained the complexion of corpses, and their garments the smell of the sepulchre. Some believe it is after this fashion that the Lord Jesus raises us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. So far at least as this world is concerned, we must expect to retain the blemishes and scent of moral corruption. We 'have not so learned Christ.' We believe in the ability and

purpose of Christ to cleanse us from every defilement, and to keep us in perfect purity of flesh and spirit. But are all to be thus saved? Here we falter. We think some are destined to attain pre-eminent excellence, whilst others must abide frail and faulty.

Is the young student taught that some impracticable barrier separates him from the highest intellectual excellence? On the contrary, he is taught to cherish a sense of brotherhood with the illustrious spirits of all time.

> 'Ever their phantoms rise before us,
> Our lordlier brothers, yet one in blood.'

And it would be fraught with endless mischief if we were to deny the student the hope of utmost mental eminence. Surely then we ought to hesitate to place any gulf between the grandest characters of the Church of God and the lowliest of its members. There are deep reasons in nature why the mass of men can never become great dramatists, orators, musicians, artists; but there are no such reasons why the mass of Christians can never rival those holy men and women who shine like stars in the Master's hand. A genius for holiness no man has except as he seeks it from the Spirit of God, and here all may seek and find. God's Word is again very plain and very broad. 'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of Whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, accord-

ing to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with *all* saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.' There is no sublimer promise than this; here the fulness of the gift in Christ is depicted in burning words. And the promise is as cosmopolitan as it is rich and glorious. *All* saints may know the eternal love which passeth knowledge; *all* saints may be filled with the fulness of God. 'But we *all*, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory.'

Let us live with the conviction that God contemplates our utmost perfection, and that those imperfections which we tolerate as being inevitable are to Him occasions of infinite grief. Those interested in horticulture complain, that the flower-shows which have increased of late years have done injury to the cause they were intended to serve. They stimulate the production of magnificent fruit, of beautiful flowers, of handsome plants; but the gardens in which these prize specimens are grown are otherwise neglected. The gardener pays undue attention to the plants that will secure him reputation, throwing his whole strength into some bunches of grapes, some

dozen roses, some trained chrysanthemums, to the comparative neglect of everything else. Some think a similar error vitiates our modern educational system: the teacher too often throwing his whole strength into a few pupils, securing their singular success at the expense of the rest. Not thus, however, does God cultivate His vineyard. The purpose of God is not realized in the occasional brilliant fruition of a Leighton, a Baxter, a David Stoner or a John Smith; God watches over His vineyard, watering it every moment, to the end that every flower should be full of beauty, every plant reach the ideal grace, every branch bend with the largest, ripest clusters.

5. And even into our ultimate *Glorification* we carry the depreciating idea of ourselves. Many of God's people live with the hope of just getting through at last; they believe 'they shall not arrive in the ship, but float ashore on a plank; they figure to themselves some subordinate place in heaven they will be thankful to secure. A false humility is about as bad as a false ambition; and it will be well for us, thinking as meanly as we please about ourselves, to cherish to the full the great promises and immortal hopes of Christianity.

'Oh! for a humbler heart and prouder song.'

Let the humblest live fast to hopes of wonderful victory and abundant entrance. 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which

the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto *all* them also that love His appearing.' Paul would receive a lustrous diadem—one not less brilliant, not less weighty, pertains to all truly faithful men. 'Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.' Loyal to God in heart and action He will not desert us in death, and beyond the grave shall surprise us with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Our text is taken from one of the 'Hallelujah Psalms'—Psalms supposed to have been written on the return from the captivity, and full of new-born enthusiasm, of buoyancy and boundless expectation. The heart of the people, full of gratitude, faith and courage, expresses itself in the sounding music of these poems. They felt the power of Israel's God, and arose, leaving behind the days of weakness and darkness, going forth with triumphal odes to the conquest of the world. Ought we not in God's Church to-day to arise and commence a grander life? Is it not high time for us to forsake this lower life, and with songs aspire not to a higher life merely but to the highest? Oh! that Christ's Church might ring with Hallelujah Psalms. Let us seek for the fulfilment of every promise of the Word; for the realization of every excellence of character; for the enjoyment of every privilege and blessing of the Church. Let us covet earnestly the best gifts,

and attempt the greatest things in the strength of grace. In this empire, all are peers; in this temple, all are priests; in this palace, all wear the likeness of kings. Let us lose nothing now—not a gift, not a grace, not a joy; let us thus take care also that not one leaf of gold is lost from our crown. 'See that ye receive a full reward.'

VII.

UNACCOMPLISHED AIMS.

'And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. And the Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto My name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart. Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house.'—1 KINGS viii. 17-19.

WE are often conscious of inability to carry into effect cherished designs of the soul. As David vainly wished to build the temple, so do all noble souls project service which the limitations of this poor life forbid. Our plans are many and grand, our performances few and small at best. It is a perilous voyage from desire to realization, and many a gracious speculation is shipwrecked ere it reaches port. Our desires and designs are frustrated by manifold accidents, and a life with any large inspiration in it resembles the blossom-smothered fruit-trees on which few blooms set. Therefore are we often fretted, and regard these unrealized aspirations as a disheartening phase of experience. That we may gain a full view of the subject, let us first note some causes of failure in

devout and ardently-cherished desires. We begin with the text.

'It was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel,' etc. Why was David prevented from carrying this gracious thought into effect? His purpose seemed in harmony with the Divine commandment: 'When He giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there.' Further, David's purpose seemed altogether pure and generous. 'The King said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.' It seemed quite right to David that he should set about this holy service; he appeared to be God's elect architect. The proposition of David also commended itself to Nathan's judgment. 'And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee.' Finally, the King's purpose was commended of God Himself: 'Thou didst well that it was in thine heart.' Yet, with all this concurrence of propitious signs, David was forbidden to build the house. God saw an unfitness in him for this particular service which had escaped other eyes. 'God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for My name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.' There was an impropriety in the red hands of War building the temple of Peace

and Mercy, so God excluded His servant from this ministry.

Thus we may believe that God often sees deep and cogent reasons for putting aside His servants, even when they contemplate desirable and magnanimous service. The reasons may not be apparent; may never in this life be discovered, and yet such reasons may exist. We may not be suitable for the work we propose, our heart being warmer than our judgment is true; there may be reasons physical, psychological, circumstantial, why we are rejected; the time may be unseasonable, God's clock not having yet struck; and our programme may not coincide with that Divine order which is wide-reaching and best. When we see able men fail in desirable and likely undertakings we are sometimes deeply perplexed, and when we can say nothing else, we conclude: He is ill-starred, it was not his destiny to do this or that; therefore he failed. By the word 'destiny,' we simply mean that unknown reasons contradicted human appearances and forbade human hopes; and we may be sure that the reasons of God are good.

'Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick' (2 Tim. iv. 20). Another grand source of practical failure is here touched. How many broken-down servants of God are there to-day, Christian men and women, who have proved their sincerity, who do prove their sincerity, but whose thin hand can do little or nothing

in raising the stones of the shrine they so passionately desire to build? As in the busiest thoroughfares of great cities we behold wistful faces looking down from hospital windows, longing to share in the strong life of the streets; so are there frail, broken watchers of the work of God who long to share the toil and sacrifice of God's workmen. Ministers dismissed to solitude in the very ripeness of their powers: just when they felt the glow of a master-builder they must lay down the trowel, lay it down for weary years, lay it down, perhaps, for ever. There is the Missionary struck down in the moment he had fashioned a grand idea of what ought to be done, of the way to do it, and when he felt in his heart the grand impulse to carry him through. 'Then David gave to Solomon his son . . . the pattern of *all he had in mind*.' There are many disabled servants of God, whose heads are full of patterns; who feel how much there is to do, and how best it may be done; yet failing health has laid its despotic embargo on their eager striving. The gracious Master compassionates many a disciple to-day: 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

'And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue' (Exod. iv. 10). Physical and educational defects are often real limitations of practical service. It does not follow because men are rude

in speech, or slow in speech, that they are devoid of great sentiments, passions and desires.

> 'A million hearts have felt as much
> As ever prince of poets told,
> Yet drove the team and turn'd the mould,
> And whistled songs and tragedies
> That would have thrilled to rage or tears.'

But the lack of utterance and culture sets comparatively narrow limits to the usefulness of such; the rough gold, the uncut diamond not realizing their intrinsic value, their potential service. Gifted, warm, aggressive souls, without the orator's tongue or scholar's pen, do what they can and sorrowfully wish it more. Many devout men conscious of native power and of pure and large purposes toward God, nevertheless know and feel with pain that physical and educational imperfections disallow some of the most cherished designs of their soul.

'Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves' (2 Cor. viii. 1-3). Here is another example of restricted power. Out of much poverty the Macedonians revealed a rich generosity, and would have gone still further, but their power fell behind their will. Thus many modern disciples

share their Master's magnificence of spirit along with His meanness of lot. It may be true that small, selfish souls delude themselves with the imagination that if rich they would be generous, and whilst they are giving nothing, doing nothing, flatter themselves with dreams of impossible profuseness; yet this ought not to blind us to the fact that scores of royal souls are fretted to find how cruel circumstance has clipped their eagle-wings. The veriest greatness of soul may go with two mites, and the grandeur of the man be poorly revealed in the proportions of his gift. Many of God's people think in gold and give in brass, feel in scarlet and act in fustian, purpose in marble and build in brick.

'My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart' (Job xvii. 11). Job views his life as at an end, and in consequence of the premature ending, his cherished designs frustrated. 'My heart-purposes are broken off; my profoundest hopes disappointed.' This limitation is felt by all genuine vehement natures—the longest life not being long enough to realize all the great, gracious ideas which spring up in the soul under the brooding of God's Spirit. When we gather the last fruit from some old tree in God's vineyard, we may be sure that the hoary branches are yet white with blossom that shall never come to fruition in this world. But this denial of opportunity is, of course, more acutely felt by those whose sun goes down whilst it is yet day. As the

Chinese pathetically express it, they 'leave the web of their destiny incomplete, like the silkworm that perishes in the spring.' In these, and many other ways, the purposes of good men are balked; the grateful servant of God draws large plans, dotes on them in imagination, colours them in feeling, bends himself to their realization, but the best laid and the most generous schemes of men go awry, and some accident or other brings to nought the fairest speculation.

We cannot but think this aspect of life—the large extent of apparently bootless endeavour—is extremely dispiriting to many who have felt their desires inhibited by circumstance. When the power falls sadly behind the will, and falls behind it in its noblest volitions, the soul is disturbed by painful questionings. Rejection, renunciation, costs more than the costliest service. Whatever it cost Solomon to build the temple, it cost David more to relinquish the great design and die without seeing the holy and beautiful house. None know greater grief than those large-souled men who have set their heart on doing some worthy work and are foiled the doing of it—'the high that proves too high, the heroic for earth too hard.' Take those in whom God sees some unfitness for the special work upon which they have determined, and so renders their endeavour futile. These, perhaps, never penetrate to the cause of their failure; not unlikely they seek the cause in their moral imperfection, when

it is really found in their constitution or surroundings, and the thing is to them a depressing mystery. Those laid aside by sickness are sorely tried. It seems to them all the glorious possibilites of life are being lost—the day waning and no penny earned, the battle passing and achieved no laurel. Those whose sphere of service is narrowed and obscured by physical or educational defects, are also sensible of a very real sorrow: the conscious diamond in the rough cuts itself. Music in their soul without the harp in their hand; a shining candle within and no golden candlestick on which to plant it; dumb orators with a fire in their bones; active workers gifted with pliant instrumentalities and executive skill little know how the sorrow is stirred of these 'mute, inglorious' ones who keep silence 'even from good.' The penniless princes of God are also afflicted at the beggarly gift which mocks their royal thought. And with a sorrow beyond expression do zealous labourers lay down the sickle in the presence of fields white unto the harvest.

And here we may distinguish between those who have a real interest in the consolatory teaching of the text and those who have none. Folks of a certain order are very ready to infer how differently they would have acted if their fortune had been different, whilst they give no proof of sincerity by doing what is possible to them; in fancy they are ministering cups of wine, whilst in fact they deny the cup of cold water. These mistake silly dreams for acts of the soul, and

have neither part nor lot in a text so sublime as ours. We see how sincere and enthusiastic was the purpose of David, and how earnestly he laboured to realize the glory of God. 'Now I have prepared *with all my might* for the house of my God: the gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistering stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance. Moreover, because I have *set my affection* to the house of my God' (1 Chron. xxix. 2, 3). Now this is the language of a man whose heart was in his work, who was ready for any sacrifice, and whose greatest trial would be the prevention or limitation of his sacrifice. This is far from the barren sentimentality of insincere men, and places such quite out of court. Sincere men find it more difficult to be silent for God than to speak for Him; it costs such more to be omitted from the subscription-list than to head it; it requires more heroism to rest in the tent than bleed in the battle, to sit still than to arise and build.

There are several sources of consolation which ought not to be overlooked by sorrowing souls denied the service on which they have set their affection. Life is not so cruel as it seems, and with all these high aims and great failures, these epic purposes and fragmentary results, it is well to remember several compensations.

First, God knows and accepts the generous purpose of the heart. '*And the Lord said* unto David my father, ... *Thou didst well that it was in thine heart.*' 'God is a Spirit,' and all within the realm of mind is most real to Him. He knows as a fact whatever is felt in the heart, sanctioned by the judgment, determined by the will, anticipated by the imagination. In the count of God, thoughts are things, desires deeds, purposes performances. As a man 'thinketh in his heart, so is he'; and God knows not only the tangible world, but that ampler, richer world which is veiled to the senses. This thought ought to chasten our whole life, but it ought also to comfort sincere souls vexed by so many crippling disabilities and strange miscarriages. That the works of men are meagre compared with their conceptions is subject of common remark. The artist knows that his glowing picture tracing the line of beauty with purple of Tyre and gold of Ophir is but a soiled, blurred reproduction of his dream; the musician never finds all the chords in the organ he finds in his soul, and knows his grandest strain far below the music of his mind; the orator may charm the multitude, but he feels that the applauded oration is no more like the sentiment of his soul than the clasped butterfly is like the glory-dusted thing whose splendour-spotted fans shamed the flowers as it sported in the sun. So is it with all life. We feel a thousand times, and some baffled ones feel with special grief, how the practical life has come

short of the large purpose. The contrast is depressing indeed. So little where we hoped so much; a few things instead of many; sketches where we attempted pictures; foundation-courses only where we trusted to lay topstones with rejoicing; broken arcs where we meant a perfect round. But the grand truth in all this is: the ideal is the real; the intentional the actual; and all these non-suits of life stand accepted and rewarded before Him,

> 'To Whose all-pondering Mind, a noble aim,
> Faithfully kept, is as a noble deed;
> In Whose pure sight all virtue doth succeed.'

If you have not been allowed, for some inscrutable reason, to effect all your aim, God approves the generous thought; if sickness has embarrassed you, your infirmity shall rob you of nothing; if poverty has trammelled you, the size of your heart shall be the measure of your crown; if some thorn in the flesh or some enforced illiterateness has impoverished your service, it is required according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not; if premature death arrests your effort, the sharpened sickle is accepted for the gathered harvest, the drawn sword for the accomplished victory.

> 'Not on the vulgar mass
> Called "work," must sentence pass,
> Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
> O'er which, from level stand,
> The low world laid its hand,
> Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

'But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

'Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, Whose wheel the pitcher shaped.'

Again, the sense of unrealized desire is an index of character we may regard with some satisfaction. We live in the presence of a world of infinite need; the infinite love of Christ expands our heart; and we feel the hope and inspiration of immortality. What wonder that purposes should be born of such sentiments transcending the possibilities of this encumbered life and inelastic world! The power of an endless life works in us, and it is not strange that our desires and designs should outrun these narrow means, rude instruments and fading years. Really those ought to be distressed who have fulfilled all their desire; who have no grief over unrealized designs. There are such. The straitened conditions of life prove wide enough for the full movement of their charity; they can do all their work with one hand; they are astonished at the amplitude and richness of their deeds, rather than in heaviness at their small-

ness and meanness; life is quite long enough for all their undertakings, and time to spare. These are the souls which ought to be troubled. He who has done all he meant to do, did not mean much; and the mediocre soul with its ignoble content is deeply to be pitied. It is a sorrowful thing indeed when a man's fortune is as big as his heart; when his work fulfils his thought and exhausts his love; when the span of life comprehends his largest purpose. All that which might have been done by us and which has not been done through our sloth or covetousness or unbelief, ought to fill us with penitential pain, but whatever is left undone because of sheer inability is a precious sign of character for which we may thank God. It indicates that we have truly gauged the sore need of God's fallen but redeemed world; that we share the infinite love of Christ; and, cramped by time and sense, we have the indubitable sign of the heirs of immortality.

Another manifest consolation in the midst of unfinished work is, what we are not allowed to do will yet be done. David was not to build the temple, but God had a builder in reserve. Some writers are of opinion that the deepest reason for God dispensing with the service of David in the building of the temple was, that David was in danger of thinking himself indispensable to God. Dr. McLaren thus:

'The narrative in 2 Samuel makes no mention of David's warlike life as unfitting him for the task,

which we find from 1 Chronicles was one reason why his purpose was set aside, but brings into prominence the thought that David's generous impulse was outrunning God's commandment, and that his ardour to serve was in some danger of forgetting his entire dependence on God, and of fancying that God would be the better for him. So the prophetic message reminds him that the Lord had never, through all the centuries, asked for a house of cedar, and recalls the past life of David as having been wholly shaped and blessed by Him, while it pointedly inverts the King's proposal in its own grand promise: "The Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house"' (*Life of David reflected in his Psalms*).

Now if we grant this interpretation, David's resignation of his grand design is most admirable. He relinquishes, without a murmur, a great purpose very dear to his soul, content, so long as the work is done, that it is done by another. Let it be thus with us. Enough if the battle shall be won; the land possessed; the temple built. Is not our persistent sorrow over the faint sketch that we shall never turn into a picture somewhat peevish and unsubmissive? Is there not some self-will in these bitter regrets? Is there not pride and selfishness in these morbid lamentations? God's work will be done; the agents of God ascend and descend on the ladder, one taking up the work another has laid down. In this let us uncomplainingly acquiesce. Let us be content to 'be laid

aside for God,' and herein reach a higher height than in active services the most heroic and costly. God can do without us, and when He ignores us and we say Amen, our passive virtue is sublimer than our active and ensures a great reward. 'But go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.'

Finally, wounded by disappointment may we not be comforted in this: that our apparently abortive desires really facilitate the work we have at heart? David proposed and Solomon executed; and this is frequently the order still. One man schemes and another operates; one generation invents and another executes; and if one had not dreamed the other had not executed. It has been said that Lord Falkland's life was sacrificed in 'an indecisive action'; so thousands of the noblest servants of the race have fallen in indecisive actions, but if they had not fought bravely and fallen thus, we had never celebrated the decisive battles, the magnificent victories! The truth reflected in the text is repeatedly illustrated. We have an example in Pestalozzi the Swiss philanthropist. His great, tender heart was set upon the education of the children of his nation; but, after many efforts and sacrifices his immediate success was very small. He made a few discoveries in teaching, spent his little fortune, and broke up the establishment. He outlived all his projects; but his deep human love lived on in him, warm and impulsive as

ever. It had been his wish that 'another generation would take up his broken strivings, and reach his aim, while he lay in the grave.' His 'broken strivings' *were* taken up by another generation, and everywhere carried to grand results. Take another apposite illustration, one of special interest. Samuel Wesley, senior, conceived a broad and comprehensive scheme for the complete evangelization of the East; and embraced in its contemplated range the conversion to the faith of Christ of all Jews, Mohammedans and heathens, who might be reached by the evangelical agency of the Church of England, in the vast regions which lie between St. Helena and Abyssinia, the East Indies and China. Such was the magnificent plan devised by this earnest divine. The grand scheme was laid in writing before the Archbishop of York, and Wesley nobly offered to devote his life to carry it out, provided his countrymen would furnish him with means. The glorious enterprise was never commenced, and Wesley must have felt deep grief to see his grand aspiration end so untimely. But the house that Samuel Wesley could not build, his son John built. Not a temple for the worshipping East alone, but a house of which it may be said:

> 'To this the joyful nations round,
> All tribes and tongues, shall flow;
> Up to the hill of God, they'll say,
> And to His house, we'll go.'

This law of the persistence of influence applies with

equal force to the obscurer servants of God and their modest designs. Science assures us that no atom of matter is lost, no modicum of force: all is rigidly conserved. Can we then believe that great ideas, living thoughts, pure, high feeling, believing supplication, can pass fruitlessly away? Is all this wasted power? Does the Spirit of God inspire all this in vain? It cannot be. 'All we have willed, or hoped, or dreamed of good, shall exist.' If any of us have a true thought, let us be sure that somehow, somewhere, sometime, that thought shall realize itself and work its blessed issues in the world of living men.

VIII.

COMPLEMENTRY FORCES IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

'Then had the Churches rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.'—Acts ix. 31.

WE are apt to regard these two forces—fear and consolation—as contradictory, and when we can distinguish the two actions simultaneously within us we infer that our state is not exactly what it ought to be. The passage before us throws much light upon this phase of experience, and by its aid some of our perplexities may be resolved.

'The fear of the Lord' marks an abiding characteristic of the Christian life. The central idea of this expression is: the fear which dwelt in our Lord Himself must dwell in His disciples. 'The mind which was in Christ,' must be ours in this particular also. We know what is meant by 'the beauty of the Lord' being upon us, and in a similar sense we must understand 'the fear of the Lord' being in us. Christ was no stranger to fear. 'Who in the days

of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared.' What was the nature of this fear expressed by our Lord? In the passage just quoted the Apostle undoubtedly refers to the special anxiety and distress exhibited by Christ in connection with His passion and approaching death; but the reason given for the prevalence of His supplications, namely, 'and was heard in that He feared,' refers to the permanent habit of the Master's mind. Christ was penetrated by a sense of religious awe and conscientiousness; He was delicately alive to the will of His Heavenly Father; He had an acute sympathy with whatever was venerable and holy; He had a quick sensibility to discover unrighteousness, and an unutterable shrinking from its contact; and because of this conscientiousness and circumspection He had power with God and prevailed. There was no other fear of God in Jesus Christ, but only the deepest love and confidence. This sensibility to the will of God and purpose of God must be in us. 'The fear of the Lord,' like the love of the Lord, or the glory of the Lord, is to be participated in by His disciples, and is altogether a noble thing. It is an anxious state of mind lest we should wound the love of God, violate the law of righteousness, or fail to reach the highest sanctification of character. 'Perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment'; but perfect love

does not cast out *this* fear, which is inseparable indeed from the rarest blessedness. In this fear the primitive Christian walked, and in this fear all true believers walk. Having been made to know and love the holiness of God, we must watch over ourselves with trembling solicitude so that we may 'prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God,' that we fulfil all righteousness, walk in all Christ's steps, and be fit at last to see God's face. 'Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, Who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.'

'The comfort of the Holy Ghost' is also an indispensable element in our spiritual life. The first disciples enjoyed the inspiration and encouragement of the Spirit of God, and all disciples share in the same privilege. Scholars differ as to the propriety of characterizing the Spirit of God as the 'Comforter'; some wishing to retain the appellation as in the Authorized Version, others excluding this signification altogether, and rendering it 'Helper,' 'Advocate.' The truest view is, that the Greek word our translators have rendered by *Comforter* has a rich fulness which no single term can exhaust. The Spirit is both Helper and Comforter. Olshausen remarks: 'The idea of comfort implies that of efficient succour'; and we may add, the idea of efficient succour implies that of comfort. We cannot agree with Dr. Bushnell,

that 'the very poorest, thinnest representation ever proposed, or adopted for the name given by our Saviour to the Spirit, is our English name Comforter.' This name must not be regarded as suggesting earthly comforts, as expressing feeble over-soft sympathy, as in a soothing key, but as suggestive of the deep satisfaction which is imparted to the soul by the indwelling presence and energy of the Spirit of God. The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of '*strong* consolation,' and such consolation or encouragement is specially inspired by the royal Spirit.

The primitive Christians felt this consolation and walked in its power. Whilst painfully conscious of the presence and possibilities of sin both around them and within them, they watched over themselves with a jealous and unrelaxing vigilance, and were energized and comforted by the power and grace of the Holy Ghost. Great and sorrowful as was the conflict into which they were plunged, they felt the Spirit of God unfolding in their soul a banner which promised matchless strength and glorious victory. Some praise the heathenism of antiquity because, amid all its absurdities, it was a cheerful religion; the song, the dance and the banquet intermingled with its rites, and sacrifices were preludes to well-spread tables and social repasts, whether on occasions of public rejoicing, or in the hilarious communions of private hospitality. Now it must be acknowledged that Christianity is not a 'cheerful religion' *in the sense in which Greek and*

Roman worship were cheerful. Jesus Christ brought out the deeper meaning of life; and we have, morally speaking, far deeper reasons for seriousness than men could possibly feel prior to the Advent. Christ has immensely exalted our conception of God, of His love and holiness; of the Divine capacity of our nature; of the spirituality, breadth and inviolability of the law; and of the vast issues of human character and conduct. The superficial hilariousness of pagan worship was an impossibility to those who knew the Holy One of Israel, who had seen the awful beauty of Christ, and who were expecting the manifestation of that perfect universe into which nothing can enter that defileth. But, on the other hand, if Christ has intensified our conception of the momentousness of life by declaring its solemn obligations and vast consequences, He has given us such reasons for bravery and hope in the moral life as men never knew before. Do we fear lest we fail to realize the wondrous love of God? 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.' Do we tremble lest we fail to recognise the mind of God? 'Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.' Are we afraid to present ourselves before God's pure presence? 'The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.' Do we shrink to contemplate the wide gulf which comes between us and the perfection of our Father in heaven? The

Spirit assures us of sonship, and animates us to reach that 'beauteous light' which we see from far. Do we feel our unfitness for 'the holy city,' and tremble lest we lose the great future? The Spirit gives us the earnest of the promised inheritance, and urges us forward to share in God's everlasting glory and blessedness. The hope and fear of the human heart have alike been quickened and intensified by Christ; but encouragement, helpfulness, hopefulness, are the special features of His Gospel.

So far from these two phases of experience being incompatible, they are really complementary. The 'fear of the Lord' and 'the comfort of the Holy Ghost' are correlatives by whose joint action the believer is built up. In nature apparently contradictory elements and forces blend, and in blending produce the grandest or fairest results. Widely as oxygen and nitrogen differ they are really complementary gases, and combined in due proportions make the sweet and vital atmosphere. Attraction and repulsion are also complementary forces whose combined action preserves the universe in harmonic movement. So the resultant of the double action of the heart is life and health. Forces, laws and elements apparently antagonistic are really complementary, and from their combined action spring the glories and music of creation. Thus is it in Christian experience. The two states of mind distinguished in the text are not mutually exclusive, but co-factors in the culture of the spirit. Fear is

not inconsistent with peace. 'Then had the Churches *rest*, . . .walking in the fear of the Lord.' Fear is not inconsistent with love. The disciple of love fell at his Master's feet as dead. Fear is not inconsistent with hope. Peter who has so much to say about the terrible day of the Lord, is full of hope. Fear is not inconsistent with the highest world and the fullest felicity. Those who stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of gold, sing: 'Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy.' And so 'comfort' is not inconsistent with any grace of the Spirit, with any noble element of character, with any conscientiousness of life. An anxious thoughtfulness and a full assurance; a constant eye to the imperative ideal which is so far above us, and to the glorious grace dwelling so richly in us; a vivid sense of our high and holy calling, and of the dangerous path of pilgrimage which leads up to it; the recollection of 'the jealous God,' and of the God 'keeping mercy for thousands'; the anticipation of judgment and glory, are co-ordinate and co-operative moods in the working out of our salvation. The danger lies in the omission of either. How faulty the piety in which fear has no place! in which there is no trembling before the holiness of God, no shamefacedness, no suffering sensitiveness lest we err or fall, no overwhelming sense of the gravity of our position, no gazing with awe into the dread eternity how surely mine! Lacking this element we can cherish no true

view of the preciousness of Christ and His salvation; we attain no depth of character; and even our joy itself is a thin and frothy sentiment. The brighter the star, the more it trembles; and the purest saints, the bravest heroes of all times, have stood 'in fear and in much trembling.' Not less faulty is the piety in which comfort has no place—legal, tormenting, morbid religiousness! In a life where solace disputes no authority fear becomes servile and abject, crushing the finer instincts of the heart, souring the disposition, depriving the spirit of all spontaneity, freedom and brightness, and producing the narrowest and hardest form of character. Pale sorrow must consort with blooming joy; weakness must lean on strength; sweet comfort must soothe awesome fear; mercy and truth must meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Only in the reconciliation of these antagonisms, in the marriage of these contrarieties, in the equilibrium of these opposite forces, do we attain the fulness of life and the fulness of its blessing. Our grandest moments arise in the union of two opposing emotions 'And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' (Gen. xxviii. 16, 17). 'And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy: and did run to bring his disciples word.' (Matt. xxviii. 8).

Whilst we cultivate both sentiments, we must maintain both in due proportions. The danger is not perhaps great that we should entirely disregard either fear or hopefulness; but most of us are under temptation to yield this sentiment or that undue pre-eminence. The reason we exaggerate one or other sentiment is sometimes found in our constitution, and again in our circumstances. To exaggerate the sentiment of fear is the peril of some. An old writer tells us of a strange tribe which dwelt in caves because they were afraid of the sunshine; many devout people are afraid of the sunshine of the mind. These apprehensive ones are transfixed with awe before the holiness and glory of the Throne; the mount that burned with fire holds them with a strong fascination; they shrink from the awful loveliness of Christ; the day in which God shall 'judge the world in righteousness' is ever before their imagination. Such are burdened with a sense of imperfection, of condemnation, of peril, and are slow to consider the gracious aspects of the Divine character, the love and pity of the Redeemer, the 'exceeding great and precious promises,' the inspiriting and mighty aid of the Comforter. Let those of a certain temperament watch against this danger. All excess of fearfulness is fatal so far to the freedom, strength and joyfulness of the soul. Let God lead you into green pastures; do not be afraid to 'feed among the lilies'; open your heart to the full noon of God's face; 'abound in hope,' and you shall find

yourself more than conqueror. Joy and hope had a full share in the pure-hearted Christianity of Pentecost; 'They continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.' We are called to be partners in like precious gladness. The peril of others lies in exaggerating the element of comfort. These chiefly ponder the clement phases of religion, and remember that 'like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him'; they are much oftener found at Olivet than at Sinai; they dwell more on the promises of Christ than on His requirements; they much more naturally think of heaven than of the Day of Judgment. Those need to be reminded of the sterner side of things, and of the pressing need to 'stand in awe, and sin not.' 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.' The grandest fact in our favour ought to fill us with sacred solicitude, namely, that God dwells in us in renewing and saving power. We ought to fear lest we should grieve such love, lest we should fail of salvation after such gracious aid. The passage is not, as we sometimes misquote it: 'I will work out my salvation *if it be but* with fear and trembling.' We *must* work out our salvation that way. Do not ignore the days of Humiliation; do not

forget 'the day. . .that shall burn as an oven,' and 'try every man's work of what sort it is.' All our austere thinking must be relieved by gracious hope, and our bounding joy chastened by the hallowed fear. 'Rejoice with trembling.'

We must not miss the teaching of the passage before us, as it exhibits fear and comfort, not as alternative, but as co-existent and concurrent moods of the soul. At one and the same time the primitive Christians walked 'in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.' There ought to be a constant interaction of the two sentiments; the two streams ought to mingle in one full tide of feeling. 'Happy is the man that feareth alway,' and blessed is he also who rejoices evermore, and in everything gives thanks. In the geologic world, for distinct and protracted periods, different gases prevailed; now you have the Carboniferous epoch, and then some other element predominates: but in the perfected earth the various gases mingle in due proportions, and the life and beauty of the whole orb are secured and perpetuated. In the cruder and more imperfect stages of our religious history, periods of anxiety are succeeded by periods of jubilation, weeks or months of sadness by spaces of brilliant hope; but in the higher and riper development of the soul there is more simultaneousness in our moods, and they happily mingle in one deep and rich experience. We are sometimes perplexed and humbled

at the apparent confusion of our soul—brightness and shadow, joy and grief, love and awe, confidence and apprehension, so strangely intermixed. But we really have no reason to be disheartened by this miscellaneousness and seeming heterogeneousness of experience. In the Psalms we frequently find the most rapid transitions of thought, the mingling of most diverse emotion: mercy and judgment celebrated in one breath, gladness suddenly becoming thoughtful, and again sorrow smiling through her tears. And the same comprehensive experience finds expression in the New Testament. 'We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.' 'As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.' So far from deprecating this interaction of ideas, this transfusion of feeling, this concomitance of manifold moods, we must regard it with complacency as God's wonder-working order, and direct our self-culture accordingly. The same day ought to find us at Sinai and Calvary, gauging the power of sin and the power of grace, singing of mercy and of judgment, gazing with desire into the world of

glory domed over us and looking with dread into the realm of ruin yawning under us. The artist ranges over the whole chromatic scale, and makes his picture so grand because the colours are so skilfully mixed, the massive glooms and golden lights so finely contrasted; the musician rapidly passes from key to key, from one stop to another, and because he does so creates commanding music; thus in the believer's life it is the constant concurrent appeal to law and grace, to duty and promise, to responsibility and privilege, to the God of righteousness and the God of love, to heaven near and heaven distant, that finally gives to the character that full and finished beauty of which all artistic perfection is but the coarse figure.

The concurrence of these two habits of feeling secures the highest welfare of the soul. It was whilst the first Churches walked in this fear and comfort that they were 'edified' and 'multiplied.' The truest condition of Christian life is not found in the comparative absence of feeling. The Scripture before us implies immense feeling; it represents the soul as full of force and movement and conflict. Some old writers held the conceit that the earth before the Flood was entirely devoid of undulations—no towering mountains, no deep valleys, but the planet everywhere as smooth as a globe of glass. A uniform experience—one which excludes powerful counteractive sentiments—is thought by some a satisfactory

sign. The truth is far otherwise. The uniformity predicated of the pre-Noahic earth is surely no desirable thing. How much grandeur would be lost to the world if the mountains were levelled, how much fruitfulness also! These undulations play a vast and beneficent part in the economy of nature, in the regulation of winds and rivers, and they have plants and animals all their own which naturalists would be sorry to miss; they almost play as great a part in the story of the race as they do in physical geography, standing forth in history as they stand above the plains; and one of the prime founts of poetry would be sealed if we should behold no more those gigantic ridges with their sunset-nimbus, those pinnacles bathed in purple and gold one hour and the next terrible with cloud and fire, those white tops on which 'pauses the morning star.' Somewhat thus is it with the soul. Our ideal experience must not be a tame uniformity, which really bespeaks the absence of deep life and feeling. The true soul is full of great contending emotions, the upheavals and subsidences caused by the Spirit which worketh in us mightily; and in the exaltations and humiliations of the mind, in the soaring hopes and lowly fears, in the confidence which touches the heights and the apprehensions which reach the depths, lies the perfecting of the soul. Let us not reckon that state most desirable in which we are least moved and exercised, least agitated and perplexed; the more

life the more feeling, the more feeling the more life.

In an experience which contains the full measure and compass of feeling we secure the stability of the soul. The architect builds his lighthouse on a rock, and builds a fabric very much like the rock in solidity and strength; yet it is essential there should be flexibility in the massive masonry, or it would be utterly insecure. The perfect lighthouse is a mighty column rising out of the rock, the very ideal of strength; yet it is a reed shaken with the wind, and because it bends it stands. It is thus with the highest and safest characters. There must be in us strength—strength of mind, of principle, of faith—or it is impossible that we should bear the strain of life. We must have great faith in God, boldness in prayer, and a mighty hope of final conquest and inheritance. And yet with all this there must be that sensitiveness which is ever the sign of sublimest strength. 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.' 'Be not highminded, but fear.' These and similar exhortations are most necessary, and the purest, strongest souls are most responsive to them. And herein is our security. Like the powerful, trembling tower of ocean, his head crowned with light and his feet based on granite, the Christian braves the wildest storms of life. And as the stability of the soul is secured by touching opposite poles of feeling and holding them in their unity, so

likewise is the education of the soul thus secured. In this perpetual play of various emotion and manifold discipline the development and perfecting of the Christian life is secured. The laws of nature are arranged on the principle of antagonistic forces, and out of the constant struggle to maintain them in equilibrium comes all the glorious phenomena of the world. So in the moral life are there what we regard as antagonistic forces, joy and sorrow, fear and comfort, love and awe, and in the constant struggle which ensues to keep the equilibrium the soul's faculties are educated and our highest life perfected. As out of the alternations of fire and frost, sun and shade, drought and vapour, storm and calm, dew and hail, night and day, summer and winter, come the glories of the sky and the treasures of the earth, so out of the chequered experiences of the heart comes matured knowledge, love and righteousness.

IX.

THE OPEN SECRET OF CHARACTER.

'And from thence He arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it; but He could not be hid.'—MARK vii. 24.

WE have here two somewhat singular facts related concerning the Lord Jesus: He desired to be hid; He could not be hid. We reflect upon these facts and their teaching, inasmuch as they have an immediate bearing upon the experience of all Christ's disciples.

I. Christ desired to be hid; 'He entered into an house, and would have no man know it.' We are sure this desire was not prompted by fear or shame, that it did not spring from caprice or unworthy policy. Nobler reasons must be sought for this withdrawal. One of these will be found—

1. In the *modesty* of high goodness. There is a religiousness which clamours for recognition: 'But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and

greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.' Spurious goodness like this is condemned when named. Far removed from this stagey pietism is the goodness which does not clamour for recognition, but which is grieved if not recognised. A Christian brother is ruffled because he was not nominated to some vacant office; some sister in the Sabbath-school is pained by being passed over when an appointment was made to what is termed, a superior class; and even the Preacher may be grieved because his merit has been ignored, and he was not chosen to fill a more conspicuous sphere. These good people are not to be confounded with the pragmatical Pharisee; they have simply not yet learned to lean altogether on God; theirs is genuine but imperfect goodness. Finally, there is the goodness of Jesus Christ—the highest goodness—and this is rather pained by recognition than by neglect. Christ abhorred parade. He was deaf to applause. He sought not honour from men. Enough for Him the Father's eye; the Father's love; the Father's approbation.

With all her magnificence, how modest is Nature!

> 'Nature cares not
> Although her loveliness should ne'er be seen
> By human eyes, nor praised by human tongues.
> The cataract exults among the hills,
> And wears its crown of rainbows all alone.'

Her intense colours are mixed with severity; in her grandest works is the hiding of power; her most

miraculous contrivances wear the air of simplicity; her sublimest creations are in secret places; and with all the pageantry of sunset rainbow and flower, we feel creation reserves more than she reveals. We have the same sensation in presence of the moral magnificence of Jesus Christ; we are profoundly impressed with His perfection, and yet the grandeur of His character and life is the grandeur of the firmament —silent, simple severe. Christ enjoined upon His disciples constant sequestration, and Himself set the example. He sought the solitude of the wilderness for prayer; retired scenes for His noblest teaching; and in all the great grief He bore on our account He cared not that His pierced right hand should know the bleeding of the left. Moses putting a veil over his transfigured face, was a figure of the veiled sublimity of the great Pattern. What a rebuke is all this to our anxious self-assertion, to our pushing and advertising of ourselves, to our quiet or noisy ostentation! Let us remember the modesty illustrated by the Master, enjoined by Him. He for ever discarded the trumpet. 'Let your light so shine.' We are to be heliographs silently sending forth our great testimony into the midst of the world, asking no recognition, caring for none. Have we been anxious for distinction or applause? have we cared for the foreground? Let us rise to a more perfect life, and we shall think less of society, less of ourselves, and live more than content, in the eye of God.

2. The *sensitiveness* of high goodness constrained Christ to privacy. Culture of any kind is pained by contact with coarseness and imperfection. An eye schooled to beauty is pained by a misshapen thing, an ear schooled to harmony is tortured by dissonance; and thus a high delicate moral nature is wounded by the world's sin and shame. There is a 'goodness,' maybe, which dwells with a wicked generation contentedly enough, simply because it is so little ahead of the generation; but a deeply true and spiritually tender nature suffers in all the sin and suffering of its neighbourhood. And this is the situation of Christ in the instance before us. He had seen the worst features of the age in the pharisaic party. All their lies and impurities were open to His eye, unutterably afflictive to His holy nature, and He retired before the impure atmosphere as before the breath of pestilence. They were defiled, hardened, blinded by sin, and He shrank from them with horror. His pure soul was grieved by the common sinfulness, hollowness, shamelessness; and heart-sore, heart-sick, He sought solitude and rest.

Wherever you find rare purity you find this shrinking from the corruptions of the times. 'Just Lot' was 'vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.' 'Woe is me,' mourns the Psalmist, 'that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!' 'O that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and

go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men,' is the wail of Jeremiah. We find the same desire to escape from the world's wickedness in the Master Himself, and it is shared by all His pure-hearted followers. Monasticism had its origin, to a considerable extent, in this shrinking of the saints from the corruptions of their age. On the one side was society with its lies, unbeliefs, hypocrisies, cruelties and miseries; whilst on the other side was nature—its gold tarnished by no lust, its purple defiled by no licentiousness, its music desecrated by no orgies—and, forgetting a supreme obligation of the Christian life, many fled from the guilty city to the unprofaned fields of nature, to the cloister's welcome solitude. Christians often stand in the front of society, they often dwell in the midst of society, yet is there deep down in their heart a passion to be known and prized by God alone, and an inexpressible shrinking from that sad world with whose passions and aims they have now so little sympathy.

II. Christ 'could not be hid.' With all His miracle-working power, He could not accomplish this; and all who are thoroughly like their Master share this inability. High goodness desires to hide; it cannot be hid.

1. Christ could not be hid because of the *manifestiveness* of such goodness. Goodness is self-revealing—it declares itself, and will declare itself. This is

true in large measure of genius. A greatly gifted man needs not to proclaim his extraordinary powers; they will proclaim themselves. The flash of wit, the profound reflection, the clever simile, the eloquent phrase—and the intellectual master stands revealed. The same is true of culture. If a man is a gentleman, every one having intercourse with him will know him to be such. The noble bearing, the indescribable grace, the polished language, without the aid of state or splendour, proclaim the man of high birth, refined taste or exalted circumstance. And this is pre-eminently true of character. It 'cannot be hid.' That Christ could not hide Himself is manifest from other passages than our text. When the disciples walked with Him from Emmaus: 'Their eyes were holden that they should not know Him.' But how transient and incomplete was this obscuration! Their understanding was apprised of His masked dignity. Their heart realized Him still more distinctly: 'And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?' And soon: 'Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him.' However carefully He might shroud Himself, some rift in the cloud, some shifting of the darkness, would betray the hidden glory. And, indeed, the course adopted of making Palestine the scene of the Incarnate Life is itself the supreme illustration of the necessary manifestiveness of glorious character. As has been

pointed out, Christ did not make His advent in a great political centre like Rome, or a great intellectual centre like Athens, but spent His life in the villages of a remote and despised province. Yet notwithstanding this rejection of all adventitious aids to popularity, despite this deep hiding in provincial obscurity, slowly yet surely did His character loom forth large and grand, drawing to itself the eyes and reverence of the world.

It is ever thus with worthy lives—*hidden*, they are *revealed;* all the more impressively revealed for the attempt at retirement and suppression. The hidden violets proclaim their presence in every passing breeze; the lark, hidden in the light, fills all the landscape with music; and the vivid freshness of grass and flower betrays all the secret windings of the coy meadow-stream. Thus superiority of mind and life all unconsciously reveals itself, makes itself everywhere known and felt as a thing of beauty and blessing—all the more penetrating for its softness, all the more subduing for its silence, all the more renowned for its secrecy. The still, small whisper shakes the world; those are crowned who shun greatness; the valley of humility is the peak of fame. The man of royal soul cannot hide himself. In his modesty he may draw a veil over his face, but the veil itself will share the transfiguration. Or, if constitutionally timid and retiring, the superiority of his spirit and method will declare itself, and the 'unknown' are the

'well known.' Or, he may be poor, illiterate, persecuted, yet will the innate grandeur shine through all poverty, rudeness or unpopularity, winning the suffrages of all beholders. And as he cannot hide himself, neither can the world hide him. Never does the world appear more foolish than when it attempts to extinguish a burning and shining light. In the Indian legend a mighty, wicked sorcerer seeks, with very poor success, to keep the sun, moon and stars in three separate chests ; and those who have sought to suppress God's servants have succeeded no better. John was banished to Patmos ; but far from sinking out of view in the solitary sea, he stands before the world amid sublimest illuminations, like his own 'angel standing in the sun.' They drove Luther into the Wartburg; but there, in translating the Scriptures into German, he became the cynosure of all eyes. Bunyan's enemies consigned him to Bedford goal, and so he became known to the race, one of the foremost of the immortals of Christendom. Eminent goodness will out—neither men nor devils can keep it under a bushel.

Is not a type of goodness rather popular in our time discredited by the text: 'He could not be hid'? For example, we hear much of 'hidden disciples'; and these are supposed to be a superior race to the witnessing disciples. A profession of religion, an identification of one's self with Christ's Church, an open, active interest in evangelic service, is quietly

assumed as a rather vulgar and ancient type of discipleship. The 'hidden disciple' is the superior person of the religious world, altogether above and beyond the 'Philistinism' of profession and creed. If the 'hidden disciple' is a true disciple, he will not be hidden long—constrained by Christ's love, he will acknowledge Christ, and the world will take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus. Some reprovingly aver that their religion 'is altogether a thing between God and their own soul.' But, verily, if there is anything between God and our soul, all who know us will soon get wind of it. We are told also of 'an unspoken love.' In old times, when God's people felt the fire kindle, they spake with their tongue; but the modern, superfine sentiment is altogether too sublime a thing for expression. Yet in all ages will true love to Christ not fail to find a tongue. In the religious sphere we may find much of that culture, æstheticism, ultra-refinement which is the rage of the moment in society and art; and this weakness chiefly reveals itself in deprecating an open confession of Christ, a distinctively Christian character and programme. But wherever there is true love to God, wherever there is loyal discipleship with Christ, there will be a formal acknowledgment of the fact on the part of the disciple himself, and the discernment of the essential spirit by all beholders. The true disciple cannot be hid any more than his Master could. The Chinese have a wood which, buried some feet

underground, fills the air with fragrance; and thus grand qualities, powers, graces assert themselves through all obstructions, filling the atmosphere of earth with the fragrance of heaven.

2. Once more, Christ could not be hid because of humanity's *felt need* of what great goodness has to give. Mark the event which drew Christ forth from His sequestration. 'For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of Him, and came and fell at His feet: the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought Him that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.' How she knew of the power and presence of Jesus it boots little to conjecture. Misery has a swift instinct for a helper, and as Lange observes: 'The keen sagacity with which need here scents out and finds her Saviour is of infinite, quite indeterminable magnitude.' Observers have stated that if flowers are placed in a window, the window closed and the blinds drawn, the bees outside are aware of the presence of flowers, and beat against the window-panes, evidently anxious to reach them. This 'action at a distance' is sufficiently wonderful; yet misery has a sense still more keen, faith a penetration yet more powerful. Christ 'entered into a house, and would have no man know it,' and no doubt took necessary measures to secure and preserve secrecy; but the sorrowful woman discovered His locality, apprehended His power and grace, and rested not till she gained

that Plant of Renown whose leaves are 'for the healing of the nations.' The world in its pharisaical mood may spurn Christ and drive Him away; but as the world realizes its misery it feels its absolute need of Him, and feels after Him, if haply it may find Him.

All this is true, in its measure, of those who are like Christ. The world needs them, knows them, and denies them retirement and leisure. Men of surpassing ability need not be concerned lest they should be overlooked or forgotten; they are nearly the last to be ignored; the world is badly in need of their skill. The man of surpassing goodness is, however, the very last to be slighted. The world needs, more than it needs anything else, men who can sympathize, teach, pray, save. Christ taught us this: 'Ye are the salt of the earth. . . .Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.' If a Church is a true Church of Jesus Christ, it has the bread for which the world hungers, the medicine for its sores, the secret for its happiness. And men will never be wholly ignorant when such treasures are in their midst, nor permit such a Church to make itself invisible. The world cries out for the Saviour, and for such as are like Him. The true Church of Christ cannot be hid.

What does this prove in respect to some of us? We enter into a house and *are* hid—we are not enquired for, solicited, dragged unwillingly into the light. We wish to be let alone, and are let alone. What does all

this reveal but the poverty of our nature! We are not sought out, for we are not worth seeking. A needy heart is an infallible divining-rod to discern where the gold is hidden in the social strata, and if none enquire for us, if none disturb our solitude, we may infer with certainty that there is little preciousness in our nature either toward God or man. He who knows the deep things of God will be sought out far and wide, as the Queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. A man of prayer will ever be importuned, and an interest besought in his sympathy and supplication. The good Samaritan is known throughout the city, and his aid implored day and night. If a Christian abides hidden, there is little to hide. If we are greatly pure, sympathetic, wise, prayerful, we are worth discovering and shall soon and often be discovered. If there is in us the sweetness of the Rose of Sharon, we shall not be permitted to waste our 'sweetness on the desert air;' if there is in us the preciousness and beauty of God's jewels, we shall be fished from deepest caves to enrich the world.

3. Christ could not be hid, because of the *self-sacrificing* nature of His perfect goodness. When the afflicted woman made herself and her sorrow known to the Master, He did not refuse to come forth from His hiding-place. To yield to her was very probably to bring Himself once more into the blaze of an unwelcome popularity; but her plaint he could not, would

not, deny. His compassion triumphed over every other consideration. As the Fathers said, Christ, in this matter, had a 'double will'—a disposition to be hid, a disposition to bless, and the latter prevailed. The Divine sensibility which shrank from publicity yielded to that Divine generosity which came to seek and to save that which was lost. Christ teaches us here once again that the imperative grace is self-sacrifice—that every other consideration must be overruled by this.

At the bottom of monasticism is a real selfishness. The highest goodness came into a sinful world to suffer in it, with it, for it; and whatever may be the romance of monasticism, that is a maimed goodness which shuns the naughty world in love of solitude and safety. He may be a good man who craves a life of retirement and contemplation, he is far better who denies himself for the world's sake. Desiring to be hid, we are half like Jesus Christ; desiring to be hid, but forced by charity into the light, we are like Christ altogether. We are not in danger, perhaps, of formal monasticism; but there is a wide-spread selfishness in the Church of Christ which leads us to dwell comfortably in our houses, strangely forgetful of the sin and misery at the door. Christ could not dwell in the house—He longed for its repose, its rest, its solacements, but His infinite charity forced Him into the street, and made Him the Minister of the multitude. We may be powerfully disinclined to public life and service, but if we can reconcile ourselves to a life of sheltered tranquillity we

are wonderfully unlike our Lord. Let us, in these days of manifold luxury and chronic self-indulgence, remember the admonition of the Prophet: 'Woe to them that are at ease in Zion. That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.' (Amos vi. 4—6.) Rather let us forsake all selfish pleasure and sing in the self-sacrificing perfection of our Master:

> 'Freely to all ourselves we give,
> Constrained by Jesu's love to live
> The servants of mankind.'

The world's woe made Christ visible, and it will make His people visible too. Travellers tell that the forests of South America are full of the gem-like humming-bird, yet you may sometimes ride for hours without seeing one. They are most difficult to see when perched among the branches, and almost indistinguishable flying among the flowering trees; it is only every now and then some accidental circumstance reveals the swarm of bejewelled creatures, and they flash upon the vision in white, red, green, blue and purple. It is somewhat thus with society—the noblest, the most beautiful characters, are not the

obtrusive ones. Going through life carelessly, one might think all the people common enough ; reading the newspapers, one might suppose the world to contain only bad men ; but it may comfort us to remember the truly great and good shun observation and walk humbly with God. The poorest and worst side of things is the most obvious. 'It is the glory of God to conceal a thing' ; and it is the glory of God's people to conceal themselves. Nevertheless, the time comes for their revelation, and then we are delighted to find how much silent, hidden goodness the world contains. The spectacle of want and woe draws forth the excellent ones of the earth ; and, however keen the trial of public life, however repugnant contact with scenes of sin and shame and suffering, all is bravely, cheerfully borne for the Saviour's sake and the world's betterment. When a true soul hesitates between the contemplative and active life, the example of Christ and love of Christ determines to self-renouncing service.

X.

BURIED IDOLS.

'And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods that were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.'—GEN. xxxv. 4.

JACOB did not break or burn the idols, but *hid* them. Jacob's besetting sin was double-dealing, and it appears to us the text is another example of the patriarch's special failing. He was not altogether weaned from his idols, he had a lingering regard for them; he did not, even yet, yield himself fully to Jehovah. Let us show,

I. *How we may still be guilty of the equivocal conduct recorded in the text.*

1. We are thus guilty when we retain privately those evil practices we have renounced in public. This is by no means an uncommon method of conduct. Evils are removed from the public eye only to be repeated in more private life. The prophet Ezekiel had to 'dig through the wall' to see what his countrymen 'did in the dark, each one in the chambers of his imagery.' And in 2 Kings xvii. 9,

we read: 'And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord.' The New Testament furnishes a similar illustration. 'And many that believed came and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men.' (Acts xix. 18, 19). The parties here referred to were evidently believers who had continued in a suppressed form their idolatrous superstitions. Is there any such inconsistency as this in us? Or, if not guilty of clinging to some concrete evil, are we not guilty of indulging in subtle forms those errors we have renounced in grosser shape? After a great revival in Scotland a publican was asked, What was the chief difference between the state of things before and after the revival? Said he: 'Before the revival they *shouted* for the liquor, and now they *whisper* for it.' Reformations may appear very sweeping without being profound and thorough. Evils are concealed rather than destroyed; what was declared on the housetop be whispered in closets; what was done by day be done by night. Public drunkenness may change into private indulgence; highway robbery be refined into commercial chicanery; adroit slander replace gross vituperation; and licentiousness, no longer shocking the eye in prominent places, become a pestilence walking in darkness. Unclean idols, bloody idols, ignoble idols of past generations are ejected from their niches, but

it is made apparent from time to time these idols have rather been buried than burned. Two contemporaneous movements of our time are specially favourable to the concealment of evil. Our day has witnessed a great spread of education; a raised standard of culture; we are distressed by vulgarity. Whatever else a man is, he must not be vulgar. Taste is the grand canon on which society insists more and more. Thus out of deference to public opinion men keep their vices out of sight. Mere culture does not change the moral man, it simply puts on him the necessity of veiling his vices, and with the refinement of manners which marks our age, we may fear the comparative disappearance of certain vices from amongst us is more apparent than real. The prevalence of the utilitarian philosophy tends also directly to the concealment of evil. According to this theory of ethics the evil of certain conduct is to be found in its inexpediency, its inconvenience, not in its essential wrongfulness. You may indulge in certain excesses, take freedoms which have been reckoned criminal, and little blame will attach to you if you act judiciously. The crime is in acting so blunderingly as to be found out. This philosophy has been very popular in our time, and although we are far from affirming its advocates mean to abet immorality, its tendency to increase secret immorality can scarcely be denied. Thus, then, in addition to the general reasons which influence men

to secret sin, we have these special reasons moving men to secrete their idols. A man was pointed out to us the other day as 'a *quiet* sinner.' May we not fear that this awful character just now is rather common?

Let there be no mistake. God cannot be pleased with reformations which simply remove evils into a less conspicuous sphere and gild them with soft and glozing names. It may be a real gain to drive evil from the public eye—a gain upon which philosophers, statesmen, and social reformers may congratulate themselves—but it is a gain the Christian Church can regard with very qualified satisfaction. The pure and holy God cannot accept such reformations, either in society or individuals. Iniquity is iniquity to Him, whether done in the eye of the sun or wrought in thickest darkness; whether coarse or refined; whether called by its true name or wrapped in glozing gilded speech. Burke tells of 'that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness.' This is rhetoric. When vice is divested of all grossness it has not lost a particle of its evil in the judgment of Heaven; the secret idol, the idol skilfully veiled or richly adorned by taste, is equally hateful to God with the open and gross idolatries of inferior civilization. The Christian Church must not be deceived by various social and political reforma-

tions, she must assure herself whether the idols are burned or buried. Do we speak to one who has rejected certain evils before the world, but who bows to those evils when he is not before the world; to one, who having rejected the vulgar folly or rude excess, gives place to them in daintier shape? Remember, you have only buried the accursed things; buried them in a very shallow grave too; and if your idols have not an inglorious resurrection to rule over you once again in open horror, they shall certainly rise to condemn you in that day when every secret thing shall be brought into judgment.

2. We are thus guilty when we practise partially the evils we have renounced as a whole. In the days of the English Reformation, the reformers finding the coloured windows in the churches to be objects of reverence to the people, ordered them to be broken and replaced by plain glass. But where the authorities had a love for the beautiful they contented themselves by taking out a few panes here and there —a saint's head, a martyr's nimbus, an angel's wing, and having thus mutilated the figures, trusted they would do no harm. Somewhat after this fashion are men apt to renounce the world and sin. We deal delicately with things, habits, associations, pursuits, pleasures, employments, which ought to be utterly sacrificed, and sacrificed for ever. We give up something—perhaps we give up much—but we keep something of the forbidden life. We read of Jehosaphat:

'He walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord: *nevertheless* the high places were not taken away' (1 Kings xxii. 43). 'Nevertheless.' How frequently that word comes in our reformations! We amend our ways and our doings, and yet cling to some rag of the old idolatry. We conscientiously consecrate ourselves to a life of purity, 'nevertheless' some occupation amusement or friendship is continued which ever threatens to tarnish us; we are disciples of Jesus, 'nevertheless' we stand in relations to questionable men and methods which may at any moment compromise us; we live for eternity, 'nevertheless' we permit entanglements with worldliness quite out of harmony with spirituality of life and aim. This 'nevertheless' is the occasion of deep unhappiness; it sadly interrupts the full flow of that gladness which streams in every sincere and simple soul. This 'nevertheless' is also very frequently the point of departure to a lower life, alas! not rarely to the lowest.

We must not only turn from sin, but *wholly* turn from it. With nothing else can God be content; with nothing else can we be safe. Moses 'took the golden calf and burnt it with fire, and stamped it, and ground it very small, even until it was small as dust, and then cast the dust into the brook.' Jehoiada 'went into the house of Baal, and brake it down; his altars and his images brake he in pieces thoroughly.' And

Josiah 'burnt the vessels of Baal, and stamped them small, and cast the dust upon the graves.' This is the model iconoclasm. Thus are we to renounce sin both in principle and manifestation. Compromise has no place with a noble conscience. Some of our gods may seem innocent, some beautiful, some valuable, some linked with tender memories, some have pleasant and some lucrative associations, but all must go, go absolutely and finally. And surely we may let the latest thing of evil, or thought of evil pass without a regret. Whatever of beauty, or profit, or tenderness may go with sin; whatever of pleasantness, or power, or heroism, or glory may have become mixed up with evil places, people and pursuits, they do not belong to sin, neither can they perish with it. When we burn our idols we burn only the dross of life, all its pure gold remains. Whatever precious things have gone with our worldly or wicked ways, were precious things torn from their parent stem and living source, and the utter rejection of all that is bad or doubtful will not deprive us of one genuine jewel, not one bright thread, not one sweet flower, not one shining grain of life's dust of gold. So soon as we have parted with the last relic of our old idolism—that relic which appeared so venerable, or pathetic, or precious, or beautiful—we find all the pathos, and wealth, all the brightness and grandeur of existence, still ours in the love and likeness of the Living God. We need never cling to any shred of evil because of

some costliness or loveliness or mirth that happens to adhere to it, for in the friendship of God and the life of righteousness the whole realm of beauty glory and joy is ours for ever.

3. We are thus guilty when we retain mentally what we have renounced in action. It is possible that the idols of life which have no longer any concrete existence may find asylum in the heart and brain, and be most steadily worshipped there. This is true,

When the evil renounced in the life is not also renounced in the *will*. Under certain pressure men will pull the idol out of its niche, without casting it from their heart; they do not renounce the unrighteousness in mind and purpose. Fear will bring this about. Thus it was with Jacob at this very time. His sons by most cruel and perfidious conduct had provoked the wrath of the Shechemites, and Jacob in distress turned to God, purging his house of idols. Under the influence of fear Jacob put away the obnoxious things in the spirit and manner of one who might some day resuscitate them. Thus evil is often discarded. In the Puritan period idols were put away, but, as the result proved, only buried, for no sooner did the austere Government cease than out came the old images of passion, pride and pleasure. In the days of cholera we have seen idols swept out of sight, personal and social evil discontinued on the largest scale; but no sooner had the pestilence passed than the people lapsed into their old follies and sins.

A sense of interest sometimes constrains men to depose their idols. We hear much of 'the utility of religion;' and the profitableness of this virtue or that has frequently far more to do with its popularity than its inherent beauty or obligation. For various reasons idols vanish, being buried in sure and certain hope of inglorious resurrection. As an old writer quaintly remarks: 'We do with our sins as servants do with their fires when they go to bed; put them not out, but rake them up.' It is a question for all, How far is our goodness based upon our will? We have declined the evil habit, deed, association—have we renounced the evil principle? Is our goodness the result of fear or policy, or the result of inward choice and determination? Have we given up our idols because we saw the inconvenience of them, or because we saw the wickedness of them? If we have not felt the essential vanity of the world, the essential evil of sin, our moralities are but marble and guilt tombstones beneath which lie hidden the idols which God hates.

When the evil renounced in our life is cherished in our *imagination* we are victims of the patriarch's fallacy. It has been said: 'It is possible to live a life of imagination quite distinct from the active life.' This is quite true. Our life may be as blameless on the practical side as it is stained on the mental side. To the natural eye the Jewish temple contained no sign of idolatry, but when God opened the eyes of Ezekiel,

and he saw the temple in vision, 'behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel pourtrayed upon the wall round about.' Thus outwardly we may be free from abominable vices, and yet God see our heart a very pantheon of hateful and loathsome idols—the images of pride, covetousness, and lust painted on every wall. In this day gross animal pleasures are not tolerated as they were by Greek and Roman, but, it has been asked, Has not an *imaginative sensualism* taken the place of these animal pleasures? Have we not a literature which supplies the imagination with pictures of sensual indulgence, a literature in which the sensualised soul may revel in all its vacant hours? We have popular poems and romances, which repeat to the modern imagination all the worst phases of ancient licentiousness. And without the intervention of tainted literature we may figure to ourselves and relish the working out of passions which have no longer any place in our active life. This will not do. If in our life there be no impiety, yet in imagination we revel in dreams of ambition, dreams of pleasure, dreams of passion, we have but concealed the accursed things which the fire of heaven ought to have consumed. God 'searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of the children of men.' Let us stand in awe of Him, and keep His temple all glorious within. Let us join with the Psalmist: 'I hate vain thoughts: but Thy law do I love.'

When the evil renounced in our life is cherished in

affection we similarly err. We profess renunciation of the world—of its pomps and vanities; yet do we sympathise with the merely secular side of life. How intoxicated we are by a little prosperity! How depressed by a little adversity! The world has still a place in our heart; we are not altogether rid of the great idol. Photographers say that an image is sometimes so deeply impressed on the glass, that no subsequent cleaning of the plate, even with strong acids, will completely remove the picture: when the plate is used for receiving another picture, the original image makes its reappearance, and shows dimly spectrally through. Thus, even after we have been made partakers of the grace of God does the old nature assert itself, the image of the earthly leering through the image of the heavenly. We are deeply pained to find 'the old man' dimming the beauty of the 'new man;' to find the carnal obtruding on the spiritual; to find the shadow of evil darkening the brightness of the better life. 'My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to Thy word.'

Our idols then may be cast down, without being cast off; they may be dislodged, without being destroyed. Great is 'the deceitfulness of sin.' We bury idols in private, bury them in our heart, when the world, the Church, nay, when we ourselves, reckon them utterly extinct. In these catholic days we love to dwell on 'the soul of goodness in things evil,' and it is a precious truth to be held most firmly; whenever we go

into the world we may remember it to our great encouragement and expediting in all evangelic work. But entering into the Church it is our duty to remember the defects of our righteousness, to think sadly of the soul of badness in things good. If all buried idols could have resurrection, if all our secret sympathy with sense and sin could be made palpable, if all our complicities with worldliness were discerned, we should be shocked to find how much unreality there is in our profession, how defective our morality and graces, how mixed and faulty our character and doings. The paradoxical religionists of old 'who feared God and served idols,' are with us still.

II. We must feel the importance of *complete consecration to God.* This secret clinging to sin is a source of weakness, unhappiness and peril. Lord Bacon has reminded the intellectual world of idols which pervert human judgment and arrest human progress—idols of the tribe, of the den, of the market, and of the theatre. So the secret idols in the Christian Church discolour our judgments, sap our will, brush the bloom from our beauty, damp our joy, impede our progress. Our hidden faults infallibly make their sign in our feebleness, dimness of vision, infelicity. And the day must come when our secret sins shall be set in the light of His countenance, and when we shall be covered with confusion. 'The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid.' (Hosea xiii. 12). But mark what follows: 'The sorrows of a travailing woman shall

come upon him' (v. 13). We may disguise our sin before men, refuse its full recognition to ourselves, cloak our shame, but there comes the time when we can dissemble and conceal no longer, when all the hidden things of our heart shall, with anguish, be revealed. 'Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols?' *All* the false images are to be cast out. 'Idols of wood and stone,' sympathy with grosser forms of evil; 'idols of silver and gold,' the inner worship of power and wealth and rank; the 'carved images,' tolerance of exalted forms of evil which have been consecrated by taste and genius; the molten images,' which flow from the glowing furnace of passion; the teraphim which seductively wear 'religion's imprint and devotion's air'—all, all must go, not hidden in burial, but annihilated in cremation. It is for us to claim in its fulness the grand promise: 'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from *all* your filthiness and *all* your idols will I cleanse you.'

The Apostle writes to the Romans, 'ye are dead to sin.' How completely this idea cuts us off from the world of evil! how utterly it separates us from all godlessness and wickedness! We once heard a converted Persian relate that when he was converted to Christianity his angry kindred considered him a dead man, and celebrated his funeral obsequies accordingly. They were not far wrong. When one is converted to Christ he has absolutely renounced sin, the world may

justly count him dead, and all the vices follow his bier. Passion is there gnashing his teeth; loathsome Lust weeps to lose a child; Mammon mourns a slave who has slipped his golden fetters; Pride stalks along in grief because the dead eye can no longer be charmed with palm or purple; Falsehood lays aside his mask, and sincerely grieves the loss of a peer; Selfishness is sorely smitten and bereaved; whilst Pleasure, with all her daughters, cast their poison flowers into the dust. The devil is there as the chief mourner, and all the rabble of the vices wildly wail the loss of one 'dead unto sin but alive unto God.' So they bury 'the old man with his lusts,' and let us take care that the grass grows over him, and that he has not the ghostliest resurrection. 'How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein?'

XI.

THE WEALTH OF LIFE.

'My cup runneth over.'—PSALM xxiii. 5.

THE overflowing idea is everywhere.

I. Our cup of natural blessing is not simply sufficing, but redundant. We see this :—

In the *beauty* of creation as opposed to mere *utility*. The sad philosopher of antiquity confessed : 'He hath made everything beautiful in His time' ; and the poet of to-day rejoices : 'All things have more than barren use.' Some modern cynics have roundly abused nature and tried hard to show the seamy side of the rainbow, but the loveliness and grandeur of things are too much for them, and the poet's vocation is not yet gone. Our natural belief also in the spirituality and transcendence of the beautiful and sublime is too profound to be uprooted by the utilitarian, however ingeniously he may argue on the material and physiological. Everywhere we see nature passing beyond utility into that delightful something we call beauty, glory, grandeur. Sounds harmonize into music ; colours glow until the round world seems a broad, unwasting iris ; cries blend into songs ; the earth breaks into blossoms ; the sky kindles

into stars. However the utilitarian may urge his sordid story, we cannot look at the superb dome of many-coloured glass above us, or ponder the vast panorama of earth and sea, full of pictures, poems, and symphonies which human art at best only darkly mirrors, without feeling that life inherits riches far beyond all material uses. The gorgeous garniture of the universe at which the mere physicist stumbles, and which generations of metaphysicians fail to explain, is simply the overflow of our royal cup.

In the *abundance* of creation as opposed to mere *sufficiency*. 'Thou preparest a table before me.' And how richly is that table furnished! We have a school of political economists tormented by the dread of population outstripping the means of subsistence, and which is ever warning society against the awful peril. What confusions of heart and understanding do all these ominous vaticinations betray, seeing we dwell in a world so rich and elastic! At one period of his life John S. Mill was distressed by the apprehension of the exhaustibility of musical combinations, but he came to see that the possibilities of original harmony are practically infinite. It would be a blessing if that school of economists with which Mill is identified could be brought to perceive that the possibilities of the world on every side are practically infinite. It is true that many suffer sad lack, but this is the consequence of human vice and folly, improvidence and misgovernment, not of God's pro-

visions or arrangements. Let man be wise and good, and, however thronged 'the habitable part' of the earth, there shall be 'no complaining.' The legend tells us that in olden times the ear of wheat extended the whole length of the straw, and it was through the sin of man that the ears of corn spring as as we see them now. Truly this legend reflects the truth of all times, that the exuberance of God has been marred by the folly of man. But if reason, virtue and gratitude should resume their sway throughout the earth, will not the wheat once more grow all down the straw? Or to drop the imagery, has not God many margins yet left for meeting the needs 'of every living thing'? Nay, in presence of the suggestions of modern science, would it not be more nearly correct still to say that hitherto God's margins only have been touched, and the vast storehouses of nature with their manifold and bursting treasures are reserved for the Millennium's golden years? 'The earth is full of His riches'; riches for the swarming millions richly to enjoy.

II. Let us remember the superabundance of our cup of social blessing. 'God setteth the solitary in families.' He has constituted society that the joy of life might be full. See the precious clusters which through this gracious arrangement are pressed into our cup! First, perhaps, to strike the eye amongst the clusters of our Canaan is *Home*—the father's reason made silken by affection; the mother's voice sweeter than any music; the kindly strength of the brother; the fond-

ness of the sister; the comeliness and sparkle of little children. *Friendship* is a kindred cluster englobing rich wine. Another fruition is *Philanthropy*, delicious as a fruit of Paradise plucked from some branch running over the wall. Then the eye longs to drink as well as the lip, and the ear to drink as well as the eye, so *Art* displays creations refreshing as the vineyard's purple wealth; the artist with marble and canvas unsealing fountains of beauty, the musician with pipe and string pouring streams of melody. *Science* shows the earth a great emerald cup whose fulness flashes over the jewelled lip. *Literature* is a polished staff bearing grapes beyond those of Eshcol. *Commerce* is a whole vine in itself, and we gaze at its embarrassing lavishment with amazed delight. 'Fir trees, cedars and oaks; silver, iron, tin, lead, and vessels of brass; horns of ivory and ebony; wheat, honey, oil, and balm; horses and horsemen, lambs, rams, and goats; wine and whitewool; chests of rich apparel, bound with cords; emeralds, purple and broidered work, and fine linen, coral and agate; cassia and calamus, with chief of all spices, and with all precious stones and gold.' By our ships we are replenished and made very glorious in the midst of the seas. *Patriotism* is a first-rate grape whose generous blood gives to the spirit that unselfish glow which surpasses all sensual pleasure; and the best wine runs last in that sentiment of *Humanity* which gives the crowning joy to the festival of life.

So full is the air of lamentations, that we might well conclude the world a wilderness. The greatest struggle is for bread. Yet the opulence of the world is undeniable. The grass grows on the mountains; the valleys sing with corn; the flocks sprinkle the pastures; the cattle are upon a thousand hills. The rain, the dews, the sunlight, and a thousand hidden forces make the earth to bring forth a hundredfold. How otherwise can this spectacle of nature's opulence and human stint be explained than on the ground of our ignorance, folly, and sin? We starve in the midst of plenty; or, in other words, are subjects of an absorbing anxiety for the necessaries of life in a world surcharged with riches, because our vanity and lust prevent us realizing what we see and desire. 'There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof.' To a large extent this is the picture of the race. The over-flowing cup is knocked over in our carelessness or greediness, and, instead of being regaled by the rich feast Heaven spreads on summer's embroidered cloth, in folly and passion we doom ourselves to eat crumbs which fall from the table. Surely, when the nations return to wisdom and virtue they shall no more be an hungered, but find the world their Father's house, with bread enough and to spare. And in those days, too, it shall no more be felt that the individual is im-

poverished by society. Now we too often feel that the multitude is the enemy of the individual; that the increase of the number makes the struggle all the more bitter for each member. But, really, society is the instrument of God for multiplying the world's riches and joy, and in the day when the human brotherhood shall dwell together in knowledge and love each shall serve all, and all each, until in the sublime reciprocity the land overflows with milk and honey.

III. The munificence of God is revealed to the uttermost in the cup of spiritual blessing. The cup of salvation runs over. It was not the study of God just to save us, but to save us fully, overflowingly. We see this:—

1. In the pardoning of sin. God does not forgive sin with measure and constraint, but graciously multiplies pardons. The overflowing cup is the sign of a grand welcome, of a cordial friendship, of a most hearty love. The Roman Catholic Church distinguishes between the turpitude of sins, and on this special appraisement constructs a scale of fees for the absolution of various classes and degrees of transgressors. The Word of God contains no such scale. The whole idea is abhorrent to the genius of the New Testament. The forgiveness of God is not official, arithmetical, hesitating, but free and full beyond all compare. 'He will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith *the Lord.* For as the heavens are higher than the

earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.' God's thoughts and ways are ever beyond our own, as the sky is beyond the dust, but the special teaching of this famous passage is, that God's pardoning love singularly and immeasurably transcends our own. Forgiveness is a divine art in which poor human nature is a sorry blunderer. 'Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?' Here our grudging spirit finds honest expression; here we see where the arithmetical notion of forgiveness comes from. How would this grace stopping at 'seven times' have dealt with sins as the sand of the sea for multitude? But God's love stands in immediate and immense contrast to the churlishness of man; as the starry heavens overtop the hills, so God's pardoning love leaves our soaring thoughts behind. Beyond us in all things and thoughts, Heaven is specially beyond us in the vastness and height of its mercy. And the full illustration of this is the Gospel. If forgiveness is a divine art, God in Christ is the supreme Artist, and forgiveness through His blood is His everlasting masterpiece. In His redeeming work Christ found room within the law of righteousness for the largest mercy, and it is the standing wonder of heaven and earth that the Holy One of Israel can absolve the chief of sinners. But millions of transgressors poor He has freely and fully

forgiven, and left them rejoicing in the sweet consciousness which no words speak. The returning prodigal could cherish no suspicion of his father's clemency; the ring, the robe, the feast, the minstrelsy told of an ample pardon and full reconciliation. And when God pardons our sin, the joy and glory of our soul leaves no room to ask, is that presumptuous sin forgiven? that secret sin? that crimson sin? that sin of my youth? that sin of my hoary years? So freely, so royally does God forgive, that only the strangest unbelief of the soul can cast a doubt on such compassion. 'We receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness.'

2. In the sanctification of the soul. We are not merely saved by Christ from ruin, but into a surpassing perfection of life. The Psalmist prayed: 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' What is whiter than snow? We have white clouds, flowers, foam, shells; but in the whole realm of nature know nothing whiter than snow. Are we then to dismiss the Psalmist's aspiration as so much oriental rhetoric? The highest poetry contains the deepest truth, and we must seek lovingly for great meanings in expressions which are really a Divine rhetoric. Is not the truth here, that grace gives our spirit a perfection beyond all perfection found in nature? Science declares that in things most perfect there is some imperfection, that there is an ideal perfection which nature rarely or never reaches

that the most exquisite organs lack theoretical harmony and finish. Rude matter does not attain all the delicacy of the Divine thought, and the naturalist with the Psalmist complains: 'I have seen an end of all perfection.' But the human spirit aspires to a truthfulness, purity and beauty beyond that of the physical universe, it pants to be whiter than snow; and this sublimest aspiration of our being is destined to attainment in Jesus Christ. In Him we find a perfection beyond the utmost finish of material things, a glory beyond that of the crowning organisations of the material sphere. 'Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.' 'These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile; for they are *without fault* before the throne of God.' Here, at least, the actual reaches the ideal. How full and rich the Almighty grace! 'Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.'

3. Our last illustration of the boundless love is the provision for the soul's satisfaction in Christ Jesus. History tells that an ancient king granted pardon to some criminals under sentence of death, but when these discharged malefactors applied for relief at the palace gates the king refused them, protesting: 'I

granted you life, but did not promise you bread.' This is not the theory of the Gospel; Christ not only saves from destruction, but opens to the soul sources of rich strengthening and endless satisfaction. 'In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.' This prediction is grandly accomplished in Him in Whom 'dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.' The Gospel of Christ is not a scheme meeting a certain dreadful exigency and then of no further significance; it is the fullest revelation of the Divine truth and love and holiness on which the spirits of the just shall feed and feast for ever. And here the saints feel how the riches of grace go beyond their largest thought and desire. Their joy is 'unspeakable and full of glory'; their peace 'passeth understanding'; they 'asked life' and He gave it them, 'even length of days for ever and ever.' 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' The cup of salvation overflows. It overflows language. What is the meaning of those rapt utterances which are so frequently heard in assemblies of the saints where liberty of utterance is allowed? 'Glory', 'Hallelujah,' and kindred expressions heard in the Church of God carry no well-bounded and definite meaning, but are vague ecstatic ascriptions giving voice to the infinity of the

soul's joy when language fails; they are the golden splashes of an overflowing cup, the blessedness of life overbrimming the limitations of speech. It overflows thought. The intellect cannot measure or define the greatness of God's love or the preciousness of His gifts. 'It passeth knowledge.' It overflows the heart. The saint sometimes cries with Fletcher: 'Lord, stay Thine hand, or the vessel will break.' As in certain parts of Australia the abundance of flowers fills the air with sweetness until it becomes painful to the senses, so does the saint sometimes so vividly realise the grand all-encompassing love of God that the soul is overwhelmed with the mingled pain and bliss, and only finds vent in adoring tears.

> 'Joy through our swimming eyes doth break,
> And mean the thanks we cannot speak.'

The overflowing cup indicates our real greatness. Some might hastily conclude it was rather a sign of our shallowness or limitation, and in a sense it is such a sign, but far more truly does it indicate the infinity which cleaves to us. The cup of the beast is full—exactly full—its enjoyments strictly limited by its organization, and no sense of the beyond. At all points, on the contrary, we have the sense of boundlessness. The earth is the *cornucopia* of God, whose streaming treasures go so far beyond craving needs as to create in us the poetic sentiment, which is the sentiment of infinity. The social economy leading on to

the confederation of the world and the realization of the precious products of all climes, multiplies our resources until appetite is satiated and imagination exults in riches the senses cannot overtake. And the copious excellence of the truth and grace of God in Christ spreads a new and wider horizon to call forth endless wonder and gratitude. We belong to the unbounded; we are the heirs of infinity and eternity. How foolish are we then to seek to live away from God, to seek felicity in our own devices! And here is the secret of the misery of thousands. These never feel the wealth of life, the profuseness of material for enjoyment, the illimitable joy; they have only the sense of depletion, exigency and emptiness. They live without God; use nature without God, are members of society without God, and reject God in Christ.

The cup of such is neither full nor sweet. Let God fill the cup of life and it forthwith overflows. All things must be mediums for seeing Him, receiving Him, serving Him; then is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. We must not live in the temporal, but look through the temporal to the unseen and eternal, so life becomes large and profound, sublime and satisfying. We must bring infinity into life—the infinite love and law and promise. 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup.' In all things are we to prove His will, taste His love, work to His ends, rest in His promise and faithfulness. *All things* are to be cups, all persons cupbearers; but

the Heavenly presence and blessing is to be the wine of God cheering the heart evermore. Then, when the Lord is the portion of our cup, when the thought of eternity enriches life, when an infinite hope and peace fill the spirit, wherever we may be and whatever our lot, we shall be able to continue with the Psalmist: 'The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.'

The overflowing cup educates us into the greatness it indicates. The overflow of the cup is not waste. Naturalists tells us that there is utility under all beauty, a practical design in all the apparent overflow and waste of the world. Utility in the song of birds, in the perfumes of flowers, in the dyes of the sunset, in the triumphal arch of the storm. However this may be, we are sure the apparent waste of life serves some great practical end, that there is utility in the overflow of the cup, taking that word utility in a large and noble sense. In the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, the fact that impresses our imagination most is that twelve baskets' full remained; the little that was over reveals to us the glory of the Lord and the marvellousness of His working more than all that was consumed. So in life throughout, the overflow teaches the most; we are most served by that which in some measure goes beyond us; that which awakens our wonder, gratitude and desire. The river of God which is full of water, like the Nile, enriches most in its overflow. By blessings which are beyond

definite thought, adequate expression, and regulated emotion, God educates us into the fulness of our being. Ever looking at that which is beyond us, striving to reach that which is beyond us, our nature is drawn out, our capacities perfected. 'Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it?' Now, what is the use of a blessing there is not room enough to receive? It makes more room: more room in the understanding, more room in the heart. The overflow is at once an invitation to bring a larger cup, and a development of the cup—a widening and deepening of the spirit. The goodness of God not only leads to repentance, but to perfection. O, for the larger blessing, the full vivid consciousness of God's great love and abounding grace!

Annually when the ice breaks up in Russia the Czar goes in state to drink of the River Neva, and having drunk, it was long the custom for the Czar to return the cup to his attendants full of gold, but year by year the cup became so much larger that at length a stipulated sum was paid instead of the old largesse. But however large the vessel we bring to God, and however much it increases in capacity with the discipline of years, God shall still make it to overflow with that peace and love and joy which is better than rubies and much fine gold. Let us pray

> 'Open the fountain from above,
> And let it our full souls o'erflow.'

The overflowing cup demands the full surrender of life to God. The full cup in our hand demands a complete sacrifice on God's altar. How can we withhold anything from Him Who gives us all, and gives so freely? Oliver W. Holmes writes: 'If a created being has no rights which his Creator is bound to respect, there is an end to all moral relation between them. . . . . Pascal, whose reverence amounted to theophobia, could treat of the duties of the Supreme to the dependent being.' (*Mechanism in Thoughts and Morals.*) Doubtless this is a truth we may urge against the Calvinist, but we have no need to urge it as against God. The Supreme has done his duty to the dependent being; in His vast munificence gone beyond all conceptions of duty. The grand question for us just now is not man's rights and God's duty, but rather God's rights and man's duty. He has filled the cup, He has made it overflow right royally, and it remains now that we do our duty after the same pattern. Let us give Him an unstinted love, an obedience that runs over all the small limits of calculation and utility. 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, unto God, which is your reasonable service.'

XII.

PASSIVE HOURS.

'Therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still.'—Isa. xxx. 7.

1. LET us study the attitude enjoined by the text. What is it to 'sit still?'

It indicates a condition of *silence*. Times occur for silence before men—when it is best to refrain from all vindications touching our character and doings, best to refrain from all expostulations with them touching their character and doings. There are seasons for silence before God—times when our lips are neither opened in complaint nor importunity. 'Rest in the Lord (be silent to the Lord), and wait patiently for Him.' The Psalmist reckons the tongue our 'glory,' and yet we are never more glorified than in those rare moments when, in a strength not our own, we are dumb before God and man. A condition of *resting* is suggested. We must resign our opinions, anxieties, merit, strength and resources, looking simply into Heaven. It is willingness to let God do work for us we cannot do for ourselves; to let Him fight battles for us we cannot fight for ourselves; to let Him find a

path for us we cannot find for ourselves. It is self-effacement, that the stage may be left quite open for God to assert on our behalf.

It is also the attitude of *waiting*. According to the poet:

> 'God's purposes shall ripen fast,
> Unfolding every hour,'

but God's purposes sometimes unfold slowly, and to 'sit still' is calmly and patiently to await this unfolding. 'I bide my time,' is the motto of one of our noble families, and he who can bide his time, or, to speak more accurately, he who can bide God's time, is perfect in the sublime art of sitting still. The text also sets forth a condition of *expectation*. Christ sat down at the right hand of God, from henceforth 'expecting' the realisation of His glorious purpose—and thus are we to sit, trustfully, hopefully. Sir Thomas Lawrence painted the portrait of the Duke of Wellington, and when the portrait was half finished, the Duke was represented as holding a watch in his hand, waiting for the Prussians at Waterloo. When the great soldier understood what the watch was intended to indicate, he observed: 'That will never do. I was not waiting for the Prussians at Waterloo. Put a telescope in my hand, if you please, but no watch.' The position of the righteous man in the battle of life is never one of anxiety and apprehension. He who knows how to 'sit still' has no painful solicitude about men or hours or circumstances, but conscious

of the all-surrounding Presence feels in the agony of battle the glow of triumph.

The temper here enjoined is broadly distinguished from stoicism, fatalism, or despair. It is very different to stoicism, involving no sacrifice of sensibility; it is distinct from fatalism, because it recognizes the good and righteous God freely acting in all the government of the world; and it cannot be confounded with despair, for its inspiration is faith and hope. In a word, it is putting all things into God's hands, and with a brave bright heart biding His time.

II. Let us observe the several occasions when the admonition before us is specially applicable.

In the development of our religious life we may sometimes remember the text with advantage. Spiritual life commences in the passive mood. 'Then said they unto Him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.' The glorious work of God within us begins not with our strength and mastery, but with our submissiveness and receptivity. As the Apostle teaches, from the foundation of the world men have sought rest by works—intellectual, moral, ecclesiastical, material—and never discovered it; only 'we which believe have entered into rest.' Therefore to the penitent we say, Seek not peace in the world, in gold, purple, or pleasure; seek it not in the schools, in philosophies and sciences; seek it not in the Church,

in penance and sacrifice; sit down before the Cross, and let God save you of His own free and boundless mercy. But 'justified by faith' we often forget we must 'live by faith,' and by pure and simple faith pass into the highest stages of spiritual life. We are tempted to regard our sanctification in the light of self-culture, self-help, and are continually going down into the Egypt of our own resources, instead of going up to the risen Saviour, and opening our hearts to the free, rich, transfiguring influence of His spirit.

There are two sides to a complete Christian life—the contemplative and enterprising, the hearkening and speaking, the receptive and communicative—and it is of prime importance that both sides receive full attention. But is not the special danger of our times found in our liability to exaggerate the place of self-assertion? Having seen what man can do in the spheres of science, commerce and education, we are apt to carry our bustling self-sufficient notions into our religious life. Mysticism, quietism, fatalism are not characteristic faults of our age. Neither is the Antinomianism of a past generation the popular error of the present moment. Far from leaving too much in the hands of God, our danger is, taking too much into our own hands. In the working out of our salvation we trust too little to quiet thought, simple faith, silent prayer, receptive waiting, and lean too much on anxious restless personal action. We have entered

into an alliance with our physical and intellectual powers, and look more to this side for the acquisition of moral supremacy than to serene child-like faith in the spiritual Saviour. Is there not more place in our life for the contemplative? Would not passionless meditation bring more light than does this aching brain? Is there not a receiving from God quite as essential as this imparting to God? Might there not be with advantage more 'waiting' and less striving? Might not 'flashes of silence' enrich our devotions? Will not our eye do mightier things for us than even these eloquent lips, these swift feet, these conquering hands? Might not our perfecting proceed faster with a quiet looking unto God than with all this feverish eagerness? Might not our influence be greater for good if our character were adorned more richly with the passive graces? 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.' This is a truth for the saint seeking sanctification, as for the penitent mourning after God. But to our great loss we forget it. 'Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit.' And so in the great warfare we urge against the powers of darkness, we form alliances with human, social and ecclesiastical forces, expecting large things from their succour, when we ought to lean the weight of our destiny on the Redeeming God, and expect everything from those spiritual forces which ever

minister to the spiritual. 'My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him.'

Distressed by the problems and tribulations of life we may justly rest in the passive mood. Sometimes we are bitterly bereaved. In these days when our eyes are full of heart-break let us not go down into the Egypt of carnal reason for light or help—only be still. God does not even expect us to say big words in such crises—only to be still. Sometimes we are prostrated by extreme physical suffering. Said a poor afflicted woman, 'All that God requires from me now is to lie here and cough.' Yes; simple suffering and quiet confidence—that, and nothing more. Sometimes we are defamed. When our reputation is unjustly eclipsed are we to agitate and worry ourselves? Let us rather exemplify the maxim of Lavater: 'I can wait'; let there be no impatience, no fretfulness, no bitterness. 'Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in Him: and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.' Do we suffer in estate, and find the future stretching before us 'dark and barren as a rainy sea'? Let us firmly rest in Him, and wait patiently for Him who causes our gourds to wither that palms of paradise may spring in their place. Usually life demands strenuousness, courage, speech, toil and achievement, but it has memorable spaces when God must be everything, and silence, endurance and hope become our duty and glory. In the days of sorrowful

surprise, of overwhelming misfortune, of sore dilemma, let us not go down into Egypt for wisdom to explain, or strength to bear, or consolation to sooth, but looking up to the Everlasting Love, a whole army of fiery cars and coursers shall shelter and deliver us. When we sit down, God stands up; when we are silent, He speaks; when we have laid down our reeds, He Himself becomes our shield and salvation.

The counsel of the text is applicable to us when oppressed by spiritual conflict and darkness. In times of ancient warfare, we read the air was sometimes so full of arrows they darkened the light of the sun; and often in our spiritual warfare the arrows of our foes eclipse the light of heaven. We are in heaviness through manifold temptations. Intellectual doubt is sufficiently painful, and very pathetically have generations of doubters expressed the distress occasioned by the darkness and spectres of the mind; but there is a spiritual bewilderment still more insupportable. The atheist denies the existence of God, whilst the sad saint, fully recognising that existence, has lost all the comfort it brings; the intellectual doubter cannot realize the goodness of God, whilst the sorrowful saint feels himself separated from that vast love in which he so fully believes; mental scepticism cannot accept immortality, whilst the troubled disciple beholds with open vision the heaven from which he feels himself shut out. The faith of the heart staggered, its affec-

tions wounded, its peace broken, its light and joy suspended, means much more than the eclipse of the brain, sad as that may be. In these days of fierce temptation we must look toward God, even if we cannot see. These are hours for sitting still. 'Who is there among you that feareth the Lord, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.' In the old myth Orion whose eyes had been put out whilst he slept on the sea shore, recovered sight by gazing toward the rising sun. If our inner vision has been blinded, and all the grand truths and hopes of life lost to sight, let us turn our blind face toward Heaven and keep it there, until He Who looseth the bands of Orion turns for us the shadow of death into the morning.

This monition is applicable to us also when we are discouraged in our evangelistic enterprizes. The Indian juggler is said to contrive to make a flower grow from a seed to maturity before the eyes of the spectators in a few moments; and thus we expect the truth we sow to spring forth speedily bearing its rich crown of beauty and fruit. But alas! we wait, wait long, and sometimes sink into a state very like despair. Then again, when the triumph of the truth is delayed workers are tempted to alloy it, with a view to its speedier popularity; hoping that in its debased form it may secure an entrance denied to pure doctrine. And yet once more, when the faith of Christ has not

forthwith run and been glorified, the Church has been tempted to form political, artistic, and worldly alliances, which in the end only betray and mock. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is a grand thing for workers to 'sit still'; having with both hands toiled for God, calmly and confidently to wait the issue. 'Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts.'

The difficulty of rendering obedience to this injunction is really great. There is a sitting still easy enough and common enough, but to rest in God with an absolute faith is neither easy nor common. Theatrical performers affirm that to play at statues, which of course require perfect motionlessness, is the hardest trial of human nature; and all who have sat for their photograph know something of this experience. The difficulty of physical stillness may serve to represent the extreme difficulty of spiritual passivity under the truth and discipline of God. Working, running, wrestling, fighting, are all forms of Christian experience and duty, and are all hard to effect gracefully, yet all are easier than silence and waiting. If we could be something, do something—stir a hand, move a step, speak a word, it would prove an immense relief, but to lean all on Heaven's faithfulness is the *crowning* trial, and, if we can only do it, the crowning *triumph*. It is easier to fast with the Catholic or

bleed with the idolator, than to fall helplessly at God's feet and trust solely in the promises of sovereign mercy; easier to summon our energies to effect small improvements than to receive Christ's full salvation by simple faith; easier to fall back upon human reason and strive with dark problems than, renouncing our pride, await the solutions of time which are the interpretations of God; easier to become an ingenious theologian giving the truth a momentary triumph by some specious presentment, or an ecclesiastical diplomatist securing for the Church some immediate but temporary advantage by a clever manœuvre, than to persevere with simple spiritual evangelization in the face of postponement and failure.

The Duke at Waterloo ordered certain regiments to form and wait. For many hours this order remained in force, and only late in the day were the obedient warriors led to victory. We may be sure those hours of waiting were the hardest hours in those soldier's lives. In that space of anxious suspense the Duke was winning the battle for them, but they would much rather have been doing something to the winning of it for themselves. So is it frequently with us in the strife of life. Moses said to Israel, 'The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace;' and this sitting order which Israel's God often repeats to us is far more difficult to obey than the most arduous of marching orders. A 'masterly inactivity' is the tactic of the moral campaign calling for utmost

strength and heroism—the situation demanding sublimest qualities of mind and heart. If we were asked to point out the strong souls we might select the self-reliant, the aggressive, the demonstrative, the audacious pioneer, the acute polemic, the eloquent orator, the munificent philanthropist, the bustling ecclesiastic, and yet souls of equal, and perhaps superior force to these may be found in men whose timorousness is trembling dependence on God, who neither strive nor cry, whose small gifts are determined by a stern sense of duty, who meekly leave the dark problems of life unattempted as things too high for them, whose deep prayers are largely unspoken, who do nothing heroic only quietly enduring severest misfortune, whose evangelic service is as devoid of observation as it is full of simple love and quiet confidence.

The most royal souls at God's bidding leave all to Him; the supremest moments are those in which the action of the believing heart supersedes all other action. The albatross sailing over the sea with vast unstirring wings is a symbol of power, not of weakness; and the soul which sustains its flight in the empyrean without noise or flutter, does so in the fulness of power, in the perfection of life. The Psalmist often comes before us in dramatic situations, the chief actor in scenes of splendid or tragic interest—courageous in fight, illustrious in statesmanship, princely in generosity, magnificent in speech, grand in *worship and* sacrifice; but in the lowliest psalm of all

his singing—a psalm which contains no hint of soldier's bravery, or poet's ecstasy, or rabbi's lore, or saint's sacrifice, or martyr's pang—in this meekest utterance of all that came from the minstrel lips he has reached the last, the highest point of spiritual power and greatness: 'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child. Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever.'

We conclude by noting the blessedness which springs from prompt full acquiescence in the will and methods of God. 'Your strength is to sit still.' 'For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness, and in confidence shall be your strength.' Israel lost everything by being heedless of this council; taking their case into their own hands, they lost it. So is it with us again and again. Our solicitudes, intermeddlings, overdoings ruin us, or, at least, bring us into many and sore distresses. They do in regard to our character. When shall we understand we are clay in the Potter's hand, and our grand business the simple yielding of ourselves to the fashioning of God's sovereign Spirit? 'He formed man of the dust of the ground.' Out of the clay, He worked that masterpiece of the physical creation—our body:—a strange

vessel, delicate yet strong, glowing with rare colours, most noble in proportion, most exquisite in moulding, coarse as is the material yet touched to such fine issues, and mean as its origin may be yet appointed to such high honour and glory. And what will not He Who stands at the wheel effect with our spirit if we will only be fully obedient to His shaping hand? Will He not mould it on grandest lines, chase it with the glorious imagery of universal grace, burnish it with royal colours of holiness, and fill it with that gladness which is the wine of God? All this will He do if we lie in His hand and watch His eye. How often our overweening care, our intrusive curiosity, our vanity and self-will have spoiled God's grand handiwork, and arrested the growing completeness of our spirit. And so in regard to our circumstances—our safety is in quietness. In days of tempest the helm is safest in charge of the pilot; in moments of alarm the reins are best in the driver's skilful grasp; and if the man overboard will only be still all the waves of the sea shall not drown him. Oh! when shall we learn the blessedness of resignation, the power of passivity, the victory of faith. With an apposite story from a monk-preacher we quit our theme. An aged hermit in the Egyptian desert thought it would be well with him if he had an olive-tree near his cave. So he planted a little tree, and thinking it might want *water* he prayed to God for rain, so rain came and *watered* his olive-tree. Then he thought that some

warm sun to swell its buds would be advisable, so he prayed, and the sun shone out. Now the nursling looked feeble, and the old man deemed it would be well for the tree if frost were to come and brace it. He prayed for the frost, and hoar frost settled that night on the earth. Next he believed a hot southerly wind would suit his tree, and after prayer the south wind blew upon his olive-tree and—it died. Some little while after, the hermit visited a brother hermit, and lo! by his cell door stood a flourishing olive-tree. 'How came that goodly plant there, brother'? asked the unsuccessful hermit. 'I planted it and God blessed it, and it grew' 'Ah! brother, I too planted an olive, and when I thought it wanted water, I asked God to give it rain, and the rain came; and when I thought it wanted sun, I asked, and the sun shone; and when I deemed that it wanted strengthening, I prayed, and frost came—God gave me all I demanded for my tree as I saw fit, yet is it dead.' 'And I, brother,' replid the other hermit, 'I left my tree in God's hands, for He knew what it wanted better than I.'

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